

NEW

THE DECISIVE BATTLES ★ LIBERATION OF THE CAMPS

Bringing History to Life

Hitler's last hope

Führer's insane plan to
put an end to the Allies
in the Ardennes

**WESTERN
FRONT**

THE COLLAPSE OF NAZI GERMANY

RESISTANCE AT MONTE CASSINO

Germans created deathtrap
on Italian mountaintop

GERMANY YEAR ZERO

War left Reich
in tatters for
distrustful
Allied alliance

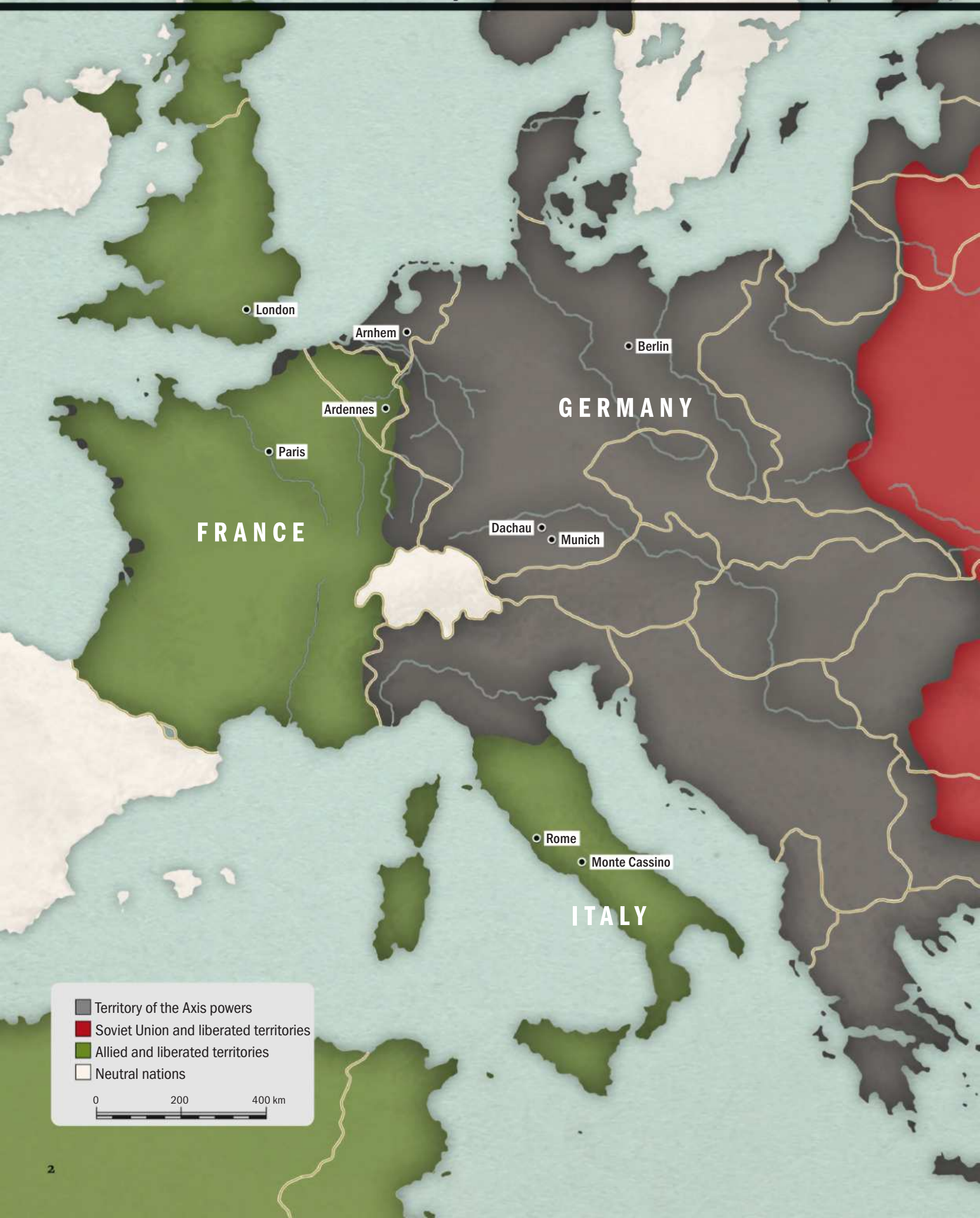
ARNHEM DISASTER

Operation
Market Garden
ended in British
bloodbath

124 PAGES ★ EYEWITNESSES ★ AUTHENTIC DOCUMENTS

WESTERN EUROPE – September 1944

FINLAND



FRANCE

GERMANY

ITALY

- Territory of the Axis powers
- Soviet Union and liberated territories
- Allied and liberated territories
- Neutral nations

0 200 400 km

WELCOME

In the summer of 1944, Nazi control of Europe rapidly collapsed in a west-to-east direction. Normandy, Paris and Southern Italy fell like dominoes – only the Dutch lowlands, the Rhine River and a mountain range near Rome now lay between the Allies and Germany's borders.

Success on the battlefield bred overconfidence among US and British generals, but they soon realised that Nazi Germany was far from beaten. At the monastery of Monte Cassino in Italy, the Germans held out for months, and at Arnhem in the Netherlands, thousands of British fell victim to elite German forces, while in the forested Ardennes in Belgium, German Eastern Front veterans demonstrated how brutal and inhumane warfare can be.

Despite fierce resistance, the unstoppable Allied war machine nevertheless crawled slowly forward, kilometre after kilometre, until in the spring of 1945, the Allies marched right into the heart of Germany and for the first time became eyewitnesses to the extent of the Nazis' horrific deeds.

Follow the soldiers who fought their way from the French border across the Rhine and ultimately put an end to one of the most murderous regimes in history.

Enjoy the issue!

An American field doctor exhausted from hard labour at the front in the Ardennes after Hitler struck back shortly before Christmas 1944.

SOVIET UNION

• Moscow

• Kyiv





He said, 'Stay there. Hold it! Hold it at all costs!' I told him virtually to go and get stuffed.

New Zealand captain Monty Wikiriwhi surrenders in the Battle of Cassino.

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Allied forces had steadily advanced from Sicily up through Italy, as Mussolini's fascist regime disintegrated. But 130 kilometres from Rome, the Germans had fortified a strategically important mountaintop near an old monastery. **Page 6**

Bridge of death in Arnhem

An optimistic Allied general staff wanted to capture a crossing over the Rhine to deliver a coup de grace against Nazi Germany. But the Allies' planned sprint through the Netherlands was blocked by an enemy that was far from beaten. **Page 22**

Hungry Holland

The Dutch railway network was hit by a strike to speed up the collapse of the German occupation. In retribution, the Germans cut off food transport to the Dutch population, who faced a struggle to survive until liberation. **Page 36**

Dutch had to be starved into submission

The Hunger Winter, as the famine of 1944-45 became known, has caught academics' attention as its long-term effects continue to be felt today. **Page 48**

Hitler's last hope

In a final attempt to defeat the Allies on the Western Front, Hitler had a crazy idea. A huge force would catch the Allies unawares by launching an attack in the depths of winter. The offensive failed, but not before the Germans had made a huge dent in the front line. **Page 56**

The Allies cross the Rhine

The Rhine's wide waters formed a formidable barrier to the Allied advance. It had to be crossed before the heart of Germany could be occupied. **Page 74**

Allies liberate the camps

In April 1945, Allied soldiers uncovered incontrovertible evidence of Nazi evil. **Page 88**

"I couldn't have lasted another day"

Jack Adler is one of the last survivors of Dachau still alive. When the Americans liberated the camp, he weighed just 35 kg and was days from death. **Page 100**

Germany, year zero

As the sound of the last shots of the war faded, a devastated and impoverished Germany had to be put back on its feet. Former allies struggled to agree on a strategy. **Page 104**

With heavy footsteps, battered German soldiers left Monte Cassino, which they had stubbornly held for four months – despite four fierce Allied advances.



THE BATTLE OF MONTE CASSINO

Where the abbey had
been there was only
a huge cloud of
smoke and dust.

Lieutenant Harold Bond on the monastery of Monte Cassino.

Italy, January 1944

Through heaps of rubble, New Zealanders fought from door to door against German paratroopers during one of the four pushes towards Monte Cassino.



The Battle of Monte Cassino

The Allies had driven Hitler's troops out of Africa and Mussolini's fascist regime had collapsed. The joy of victory was spreading, but the advance through Italy stalled 130 kilometres from Rome. Based in a medieval monastery at the top of Monte Cassino, the Germans had blocked the route the Allied forces had to take.

By Esben Mønster-Kjær

When Lieutenant Harold Bond craned his neck and looked up, his eyes were met with a sight both beautiful and ominous. The mountain of Monte Cassino towered above him, and at its summit was the medieval monastery famous for its unique art treasures. In January 1944, it also blocked the Allied advance through Italy.

"Its size and location were surprising, for one does not expect to find a huge building perched

high on the top of a steep mountain ... [I]ts stone walls were yellow and unexpectedly warm on that cold January day. The sun reflected from some of the glass in the windows, and the great towers and dome were nobly outlined against the sky. Like a lion it crouched, dominating all approaches, watching every move made by the armies down below," the US lieutenant recalled.

The monastery on Monte Cassino was on the German side of the front line, elevated almost 500 metres above the landscape on the mountain. The enemy was lurking up there, Bond learned – and not just to enjoy the view.

"Some soldiers in the yard told me that the Germans were using it for an observation post, and that was the reason why they had been able to fire with such deadly

Shells rained down on both sides of the front line at Cassino in 1944. The entire town was obliterated by the bombing.



accuracy on all of our positions. It was a strange feeling to know that the men up there, watching our movements through field glasses, could, if they thought us worth the trouble, bring down terrible artillery fire on our heads," he explained.

As long as the Germans were entrenched on Monte Cassino, all passages northwards through Italy were blocked and the entire front was at a standstill. The mountain peak had to be captured at all costs. But four determined attempts would later prove that the mission was far more complicated than it seemed.

North African elite troops struck first

Just 120 kilometres. That's how short a distance the Allied forces had covered during their invasion of 'the Boot' since they'd stormed ashore from Sicily in September 1943. Now it was January 1944 and the troops were stuck in front of the German Gustav Line, which ran across Italy south of Rome. A network of mountains and rivers gave the Germans every advantage, and only to the west was there a reasonably favourable route for the advance. There, tanks could roll along Highway 6 up the Liri Valley to the Italian capital – if they could get past the Germans at Monte Cassino.

On the night of 12th January, US General Mark Clark stood ready in the valley in front of the mountain monastery, flanked by French and British divisions with units from their former colonies. Clark's plan was to cut off Monte Cassino in a pincer manoeuvre. The night was silent, as no gunfire accompanied the attack. Instead, the operation began on the right flank, where silent shadows climbed the dark rocky slopes. According to French Colonel Laparra, the landscape was his Moroccan colonial soldiers' strongest weapon.

"The Moroccan loves the night and the mountains. Rocks, thickets and sheer crevasses, all observed in the treacherous darkness, are his best allies and over a thousand years his eyes have become accustomed to not losing their way in the gloom. He knows when to creep forward and when to wait. He knows also that there is no more fearsome weapon than that ancestral dagger which his forefathers have plunged into sentries' backs since time immemorial. Why, therefore, wake the Germans before the striking of the hour of battle? The Germans are brave, but a brave man asleep is helpless," Laparra explained.

France's colonial troops from Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia had only been at the front for a month, but had already built a reputation as excellent mountain troops. With French officers leading the way, they trod confidently through labyrinths of rocky peaks and gorges, where the war was fought between small groups of men. Mules carried machine guns and supplies up narrow mountain paths. Meanwhile, US



No one got past the monastery on the top of Monte Cassino, which was an ideal observation post, with unobstructed views of the flat lowlands.

troops stalled without their lorries. Colonel Laparra's soldiers, however, pounced on the sleep-dazed enemy under cover of night.

Hand grenades exploded in buried shelters and screams sounded from inside. Elsewhere, Germans ran out into the snow, some still in their socks. Half-dressed, they stormed towards their positions through machine gun fire that forced them to throw themselves to the ground. Some put up a half-hearted resistance, but were soon driven back by the unstoppable onslaught.

However, victories like that always came at a price. The young lieutenants were often the first to die when they charged forward, but according to one report, their sacrifice was necessary.

"In our North African units, the mettle of the native soldier depends entirely on his officers. He follows them blindly. The officers thus have to lead by example, to inspire the men. Each leader is destined for the sacrificial altar," the report stated.

The colonial soldiers captured two peaks, but lost them again in enemy counter-attacks, and the advance began all over again. The positions changed hands four times over the next few days before the Germans finally gave up.

Perfect plan ended in bloodbath

The French flag was already flying over all the targets assigned to the two colonial divisions, but their commander-in-chief, General Alphonse Juin, wanted to keep going because he could see the chance for a major strategic victory. If Juin's troops could swing around behind Monte Cassino, they would force the Germans to leave the monastery without a fight:

"With an extra division, perhaps it could have been possible on the evening of 15th January to penetrate more deeply towards Atina, a strategic point on which we could develop a wide►

Monastery blocked road to Rome



The push up through Italy had been slow ever since soldiers from the US, Britain and a host of other nations invaded in the autumn of 1943. The invasion had followed two tracks along the east and west coasts, separated by Italy's main mountain range, the Apennines. Winter weather made it impossible to advance further along the eastern coastal plain, so the Allied generals planned a major offensive in the west instead. But in January 1944, this too stalled in front of the German Gustav Line.

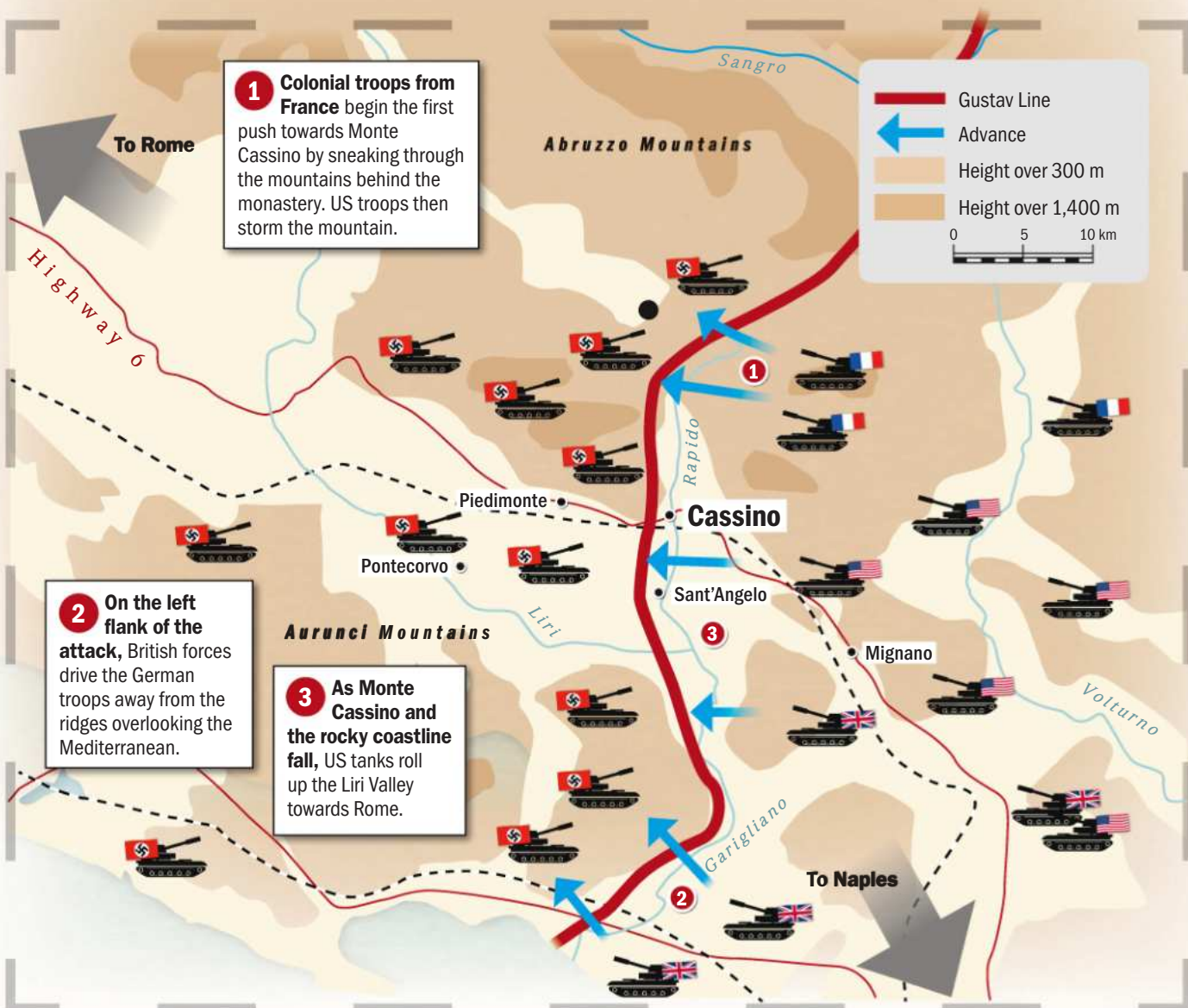
To reach the capital, Rome, the Liri Valley was the most suitable place to break through. If

successful, Allied troops could travel along Highway 6 in the Liri Valley towards Rome, which was just over 100 km from the front line.

Before the first push, the Allies were superior in terms of weapons, but mountains, rivers and swampy lowlands made the area far easier to defend than attack. Worse, the valley's entrance was heavily guarded by German troops on Monte Cassino. The mountain and its ancient monastery were a natural fortress from which the Germans had a clear view of the landscape through which Allied forces had to advance if they were to reach Rome.



The monastery's organ from 1696 was completely destroyed by the Allied attack.



flanking movement above Caira and Cassino before descending again into the Liri Valley. But behind my two joined-up divisions, who were somewhat exhausted, there was nothing left," the general wrote in his memoirs.

Juin needed US help, but he didn't get it, because in General Mark Clark's grand battle plan, the French were assigned only a minor role. No one had forgotten how in 1940 France had suffered an ignominious defeat to the Germans and submitted to Hitler.

Instead, Clark launched an offensive on 17th January, with seven Allied divisions attacking along the front all the way to the west coast. He expected the pressure on all sides to drive the Germans back from the Gustav Line. He also had a surprise in store. On 22nd January, two divisions landed at the coastal town of Anzio, behind the Germans. According to military logic, the danger of being surrounded would force the enemy to flee north, so Clark could look forward to a triumphal march towards Rome. As a British war correspondent claimed, Clark was driven by an insatiable thirst for glory:

"His vanity was remarkable – he could have given lessons to any Hollywood prima donna. Even during the desperate days of the war, when we were hard-pressed to hold our ground, he kept a publicity machine of some 50 men around him and insisted his permanent cameraman only took pictures from the left – his best side, he believed."

Clark's plan looked good on paper and was a textbook example of effective strategy. Everyone knew his reputation as an accomplished staff officer, which had propelled him to the top ahead of many others, making him, at just 47 years old, the youngest commander in the US Army. Now he wanted a victory to prove his eligibility for the post.

But the theoretically sound battle plan did not take into account the German generals, who did not for one second consider abandoning the Gustav Line. The Allied offensive became a bloodbath and the landing at Anzio failed; 76,000 soldiers were trapped in a small beachhead that German propaganda derisively called *"the largest self-supporting prisoner of war camp in the world"*. The first battle for Monte Cassino was over and Clark had taken a beating.

Bombers sent to solve situation

The Allied positions were heavily manned a month later, on the morning of 15th February 1944. Rumours of a major manoeuvre were swirling and anyone who could had positioned themselves somewhere with a good view. Even the Germans were anxiously waiting. Not a shell or machine gun salvo was fired from their side. Lieutenant Harold Bond stood among the spectators staring at the sky as 09.30 ticked past:

"And then we saw our first formations coming. They were heavy bombers, right on time,

coming in from the south, squadron after squadron. The drone of their engines filled the air, but it was the only sound, for the land armies had stopped everything and were watching the show. There was no anti-aircraft fire from the Germans, either, just the drone of the big planes."

Over 140 US B-17 bombers dropped their cargo over the cultural treasure at the top of Monte Cassino. Behind them followed nearly 90 smaller but more accurate bombers. Carrying 250 tonnes of bombs in the largest air support operation of the war so far, Bond watched in awe as the deadly cargo descended:

"We could see them fall, looking at this distance like little black stones, and then the ground all around us shook with gigantic shocks as they exploded. Another formation flew in, and then another, each followed by thunderous detonations. Now where the abbey had been there was only a huge cloud of smoke and dust which concealed the entire hilltop."

The sound of explosions was mixed with cheers of joy from the Allied spectators. Even Catholic soldiers cheered, certain that the Germans were using the monastery as their observation post. But they were ►

Sharp knives were one of the Moroccan Goumiers' main weapons as they silently advanced through the dark night.



Stalin's prisoners captured mountaintop

Fifty thousand Polish soldiers joined the Allies at Monte Cassino in 1944. Many had come from prison camps in the Soviet Union, where they'd ended up after Hitler and Stalin divided Poland.

Large parts of Poland's army were left in Stalin's prison camps after the German-Soviet invasion in 1939. They had surrendered and faced a fate of starvation, torture and execution. The soldiers' hopes of survival dwindled, but everything changed when Hitler suddenly descended on the Soviet Union in 1941.

Stalin released 25,000 Polish PoWs and gathered them into a force of shock troops. However, the Poles refused to fight alongside their former captors and executioners. Instead, the Allies made an agreement for the Poles to enter British service. The force travelled out via the Persian Corridor and was later deployed to the front in North Africa with

General Władysław Anders as commander-in-chief.

Although the shock troops' battles cost lives, the corps grew throughout the war as the flow of released prisoners from the gulags continued. Later in the war, however, Hitler supplied most of the new recruits; manpower shortages had forced Nazi Germany to fill its army with Poles, but the reluctant soldiers fought poorly under German command and ran away or surrendered at the first opportunity.

Subsequently, they joined General Anders's army in exile and fought doggedly as part of his Polish II Corps. In the spring of 1944, they were ordered to attack Monte Cassino.

unsuitable as an observation post, since we could expect it to be put out of action by heavy fire very soon after the big battle had started."

All German observation posts on Monte Cassino were located outside the monastery walls, which Allied reports had already revealed. Allied generals had therefore been divided prior to the air raid. American Mark Clark was against the attack because the destruction would be a welcome gift for German propaganda, but he lost the argument. The bombing was carried out to instil courage in the soldiers who would soon be advancing towards the mountain.

"However certain we of the High Command might have been that the Germans were not holding the abbey, no man detailed to attack the Cassino position would have believed it for a moment. It was astonishing how that towering hill with the great white building atop dominated the whole scene in that valley of evil memory, and Private Doe from Detroit, Smith from Wigan, Jones from Dunedin or Yusuf Ali from Campbellpore eyed it and felt that behind those windows there must be at least an enemy observer waiting to turn the guns on him personally when the time came to attack," explained RAF Commander-in-Chief John Slessor.

While Italian civilians wept as they staggered away from the remains of the magnificent monastery, Nazi Germany's propaganda machine rejoiced.

British Empire took over

After the last bomb had fallen on the monastery, the landscape was silent.

No Allied soldiers marched towards the summit while the enemy was still paralysed by the devastation of the bombardment. The Air Force and Army had not coordinated their plans. Fresh troops from the British Empire had travelled over the mountains from the east coast to do what the Americans hadn't been able to, but the British were not yet ready to attack. Thus, the bombing raid lost its immediate military value.

It was not until after sunset that a small British company advanced. The soldiers had to capture a hill called Point 593, from where the Germans had a clear field of fire on the slope leading up to the monastery. The men sneaked forward as quietly as possible when suddenly the darkness was ripped apart by machine-gun fire and hand grenades flying through the air. A British soldier described the experience:

"It was fierce close-quarter fighting. There was I, completely exposed on this bare rock face, operating the wireless with bullets and confusion going on all night, no cover whatsoever, not even a pebble."

The British company was repulsed, with heavy losses. The next night it made another attempt with the same result, and the generals' patience was



Wojtek the bear travelled with the Polish II Corps through the war as a kind of mascot, even carrying artillery at Monte Cassino.

wrong. As the bombs fell, Italian refugees and a few monks were the only people in the monastery – 230 civilians were killed. The German troops had wisely stayed away from the site. The reason was not German General Fridolin von Senger's Catholic faith, as some Allied intelligence officers surmised. He simply considered the monastery an obvious target:


"On our side it was considered tactical opinion that so conspicuous a landmark would be quite

exhausted. The main attack on Monte Cassino had to be launched, even though Point 593 was still in German hands.

On the night of 17th-18th February, British, Indian and Nepalese Gurkha forces advanced and were immediately met with deadly volleys spraying down from the heights above. But the newly arrived troops had years of experience fighting in North Africa and continued despite the stubborn resistance. An officer of a company of Indian soldiers stood in reserve as his superior brought good news.

"He said that we had had heavy casualties, but that he had been up on Point 593, which was clear of the enemy, and that I was to take A Company forward to secure it," the officer recounted.

Soon after, the company set off on a victorious march. However, up on the mountain, a nasty ►

An aerial photograph showing the aftermath of the Allied bombardment of Monte Cassino. The landscape is a vast, desolate expanse of brown and tan earth, riddled with numerous dark, circular craters of varying sizes. In the lower portion of the image, the town of Cassino is visible, with its buildings appearing as small, dark clusters against the lighter, cratered terrain. The sky above is a pale, hazy blue, suggesting a clear but perhaps slightly overcast day. The overall scene conveys a sense of the immense scale and impact of the military operations.

Craters riddled the landscape after the Allied bombardment of the monastery on the top of Monte Cassino and the town of Cassino in the valley below.

He said, 'Stay there. Hold it! Hold it at all costs!' I told him virtually to go and get stuffed. ■ Maori captain Monty Wikiriwhi to his colonel.

surprise awaited the Indian soldiers and their British superiors.

"I was with the forward platoon as we reached the low wall which had been the start line ... when we were met by a burst of firing from the crest of Point 593 only 70 yards ahead. We were too late. The Germans had already reoccupied it. Two Royal Sussex stretcher bearers got up to bring in one of their wounded and were immediately shot dead. The Germans had snipers with telescopic sights lined up on any movement forward," the officer recalled.

All attacking units suffered horrific casualties and none had reached their objectives when the first light of dawn appeared in the sky on 18th February. Staying on the exposed slopes in daylight was suicide, so the survivors limped back to their original positions.

Deathtrap caught tribal warriors

As the sound of the night's gunfire and explosions roared in the hills, another battle raged down in the

valley. Two hundred New Zealand soldiers had crossed the Rapido River in silence and under the cover of darkness, then entrenched themselves in a station building outside the German-held town of Cassino. The men were indigenous warriors from New Zealand's Maori tribes, and their task was to keep the enemy at bay for as long as possible.

Behind them, Allied engineering troops were quietly repairing a railway bridge. On the opposite bank, tanks waited to cross the river at dawn. In one of the armoured vehicles sat a lieutenant who described the simple battle plan:

"The story was that the Maori would make the breakthrough, the bridge would go in, and then here come the cavalry, Rome next stop."

At 03.00, the moon slipped out from behind a cloud, revealing the engineer troops by the river. German machine guns responded with a snarling hail of bullets, while mortar shells began to rain down. By the end of the night, the bridge was unfinished and it



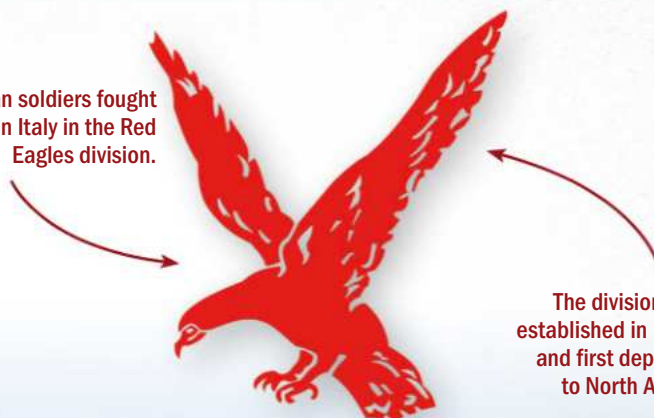
Final preparations are made before artillerymen from the British Army attempt to cross the Garigliano River on the road to Monte Cassino, risking their lives.

was impossible to continue the work. The Maori were left alone on the wrong side of the river and had to hold out until sunset, when reinforcements could be sent across the Rapido. The Germans now turned their guns on the station and the Maori began to suffer casualties.

Many were brothers or childhood friends who belonged to a proud warrior culture, and they didn't budge. To help them, Allied guns fired smoke grenades, enveloping the area in a dense fog. However, the Germans could also use the smoke cover, and at around 14.00, there came the loud engine noise of approaching tanks. The Maori soon ran out of shells for their anti-tank weapons, and Captain Monty Wikiriwhi finally gave up.

"During the afternoon they came at us with their infantry and tanks and that's what tossed us out. I was telling my colonel over the radio, 'We've had it,' and he said, 'Stay there. Hold it! Hold it at all costs!' I told him virtually to go and get stuffed,

Indian soldiers fought in Italy in the Red Eagles division.



The division was established in 1939 and first deployed to North Africa.

saying, 'No, to hell with that,' and ordered all my men out," said the captain.

On his way to the river, Wikiriwhi was shot in the leg. He was helpless as the Germans passed him by: *"I and a lot of my men too were just▶*



lying here. One German came round and kicked us in the guts and shouted 'Raus, Raus' as if to wake us up. I just lay there with my men. He went away, then I started my crawl back."

The bone in the Maori captain's wounded leg was shattered, but 20 hours later he had dragged himself all the way back to the New Zealand lines. He was one of only 70 men to make it out alive.

The Allied generals realised that the Second Battle of Monte Cassino was over and the front had remained largely unchanged. But that didn't make them change their strategy. The next frontal assault into the monastery hill's meat grinder soon followed.

Town collapsed around Green Devils

As the Allies licked their wounds, the enemy underwent a changing of the guard. Exhausted troops left Cassino and the monastery ruins that the Germans had moved into after the bombing. The positions were taken over by a division of specially trained paratroopers nicknamed the Green Devils, who were among the elite of Nazi Germany's army.

Cloud and rain slowed the pace of the war, but on 15th March 1944, the sun shone. The weather was perfect for the 575 Allied bombers that took to the skies along with 200 fighters and fighter-bombers, and headed for Cassino. Little did the Allies know that only 300 German paratroopers were defending the town below. One of them was Lieutenant Schuster:

"Tensely we waited in our holes for the bombs to drop. Then they came. The whining scream of their approach, the roar of their explosions and the noise of the aircraft themselves mingled with echoes flung back from the hills to produce an indescribable and infernal bedlam of noise. The whole earth quaked and shuddered under the impact."

Wave after wave of bombers arrived, and after them, Allied guns began firing. Within three hours, the artillery fired 200,000 shells. Fewer than half of the Germans in Cassino remained alive when the assault on the town finally began. New Zealand tanks had crossed the Rapido and were rolling in, with foot soldiers following close behind.

Before the fighting could begin in earnest, a flaw in the Allied strategy became apparent. The bombardment

may have killed the Germans, but it had also filled the streets with rubble, making it difficult for even tracked vehicles to get through. Cassino had also been transformed into a maze of ruins that no longer bore any resemblance to the officers' maps. Germans opened fire with machine guns or mortars from hidden positions, and tank commanders and officers fell prey to snipers as they tried to find their way.

Slowly, the New Zealanders fought their way forward until most of Cassino was in their hands. But the Germans entrenched themselves in two hotels at the foot of Monte Cassino. From there, the elite soldiers could not be driven out. A German tank was backed into the reception of the Hotel Continental, where aeroplanes and artillery could not hit it. With its long-barrelled 75-millimetre gun, it destroyed any New Zealand Sherman tanks that came close, while the paratroopers defended the position against infantry attacks from the side. As long as the Green Devils held out, the Allies could not advance.

Churchill took bad news personally

The New Zealanders in Cassino were stuck, and ▶ another assault on Monte Cassino also failed. For

FACTS

Cassino's civilian population suffered in the Allied bombardment.

2,026

of the city's 20,000 or so inhabitants died. Many children were staying with families in northern Italy.

German paratroopers held out in Cassino against a numerically superior enemy. The soldiers' weapons included powerful MG machine guns.



Monte Cassino was a deathtrap

Four battles were fought over a small piece of Italy in the spring of 1944. The Allies had planes, guns and tanks, but the landscape favoured the Germans, who set up the mountaintop monastery as an impregnable fortress.

First the Americans attacked. Then New Zealanders, British, Indians and Gurkhas hit a brick wall. Finally, the Poles were given the task of capturing Monte Cassino.

Allied troops from all over the world took turns being thrown into the inferno of the Cassino front, which defeated each set of men in turn, then the generals called in more troops. For four months, fighting raged back and forth to capture points on the map that were just a few hundred metres apart.

The Germans knew that the Cassino area was key to the Allied advance, so they planned

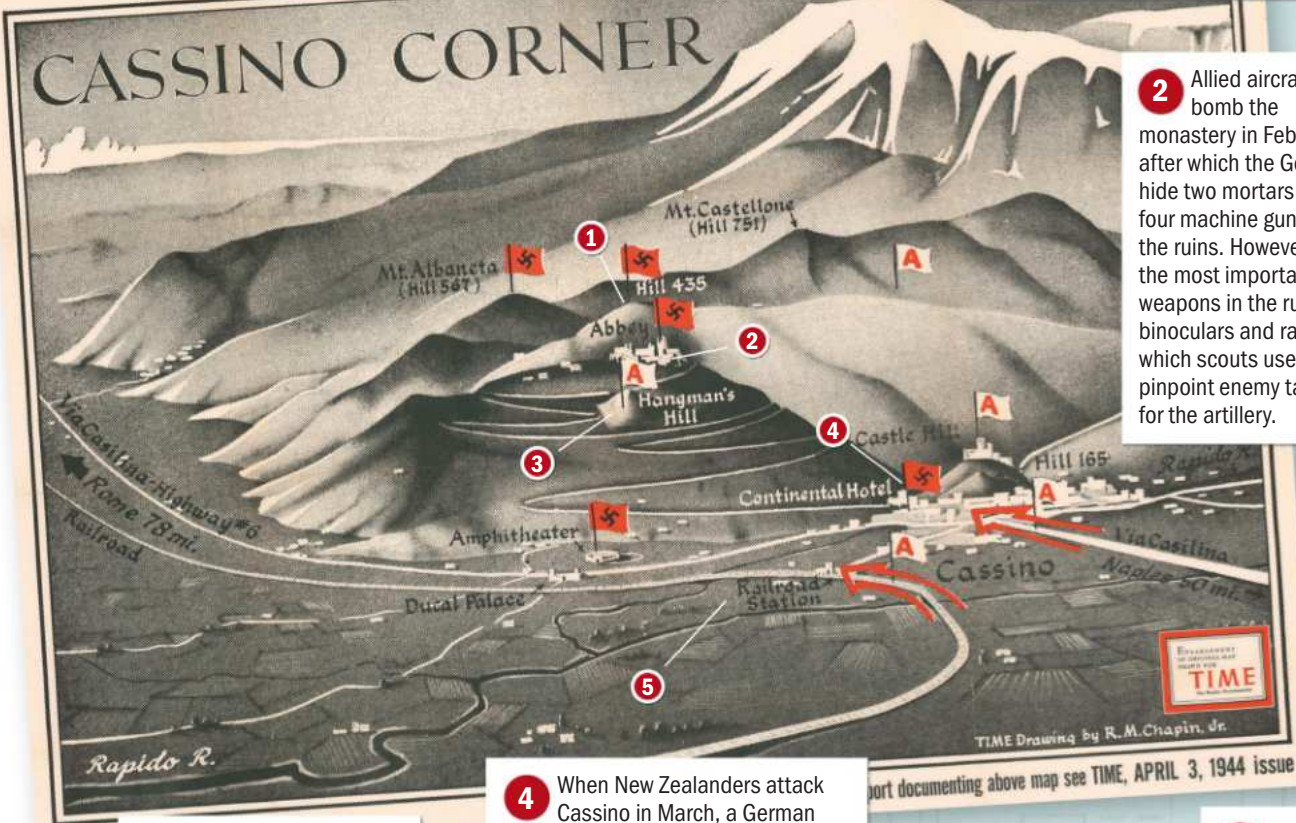
for the peak to become a deathtrap along the defence line that cut through Italy south of Rome. The landscape formed a natural fortress for the German soldiers defending Monte Cassino. From the heights, troops could look down over the barren slopes and marshy valleys that enemy troops had to cross when attacking. From there, the Germans could

easily place hidden machine-gun nests, artillery positions and minefields to make life difficult for the advancing enemy.

After months of fighting, the Allies found the Germans' only Achilles heel: they couldn't bring fresh troops into the area, and exhaustion set in among even the most battle-hardened units.

1 From the top of Snakeshead Ridge, German machine guns fire into any enemy attacking Monte Cassino. Several Allied attempts to storm the position are repelled with hand grenades.

2 Allied aircraft bomb the monastery in February, after which the Germans hide two mortars and four machine guns in the ruins. However, the most important weapons in the ruins are binoculars and radios, which scouts use to pinpoint enemy targets for the artillery.



3 In March, forces from Nepal – the Gurkhas – take Hangman's Hill, but are then targeted by a relentless bombardment. Eight days later, the Gurkhas retreat, but before fleeing, they call in covering fire from Allied forces.

4 When New Zealanders attack Cassino in March, a German Panzer IV backs into the reception of the Hotel Continental. From there, the tank's 75-mm cannon can destroy any Allied vehicles travelling up the main road through the town.

5 Rainfall has turned the valley into a muddy mess and the Germans have destroyed all the bridges over the rivers. Attempts to repair the bridges are repulsed and Allied tanks are stranded east of the rivers.





The destruction of the monastery did not include the thousands of cultural treasures that German troops had moved to Rome.



Polish soldiers at Monte Cassino were awarded medals.

eight days, the Gurkhas managed to hold Hangman's Hill between the town and the monastery. There, the troops were subjected to a relentless barrage of shells, while German counter-attacks stopped reinforcements reaching the position. As a result, it had to be abandoned. The situation in Italy looked hopeless.

In Britain, Prime Minister Winston Churchill was furious with the reports he received from the front. After victories in North Africa and Sicily, he couldn't understand why the troops were standing still and sent an angry letter to the commander-in-chief.

"I wish you would explain to me why this passage by Cassino, Monastery Hill, etc, all on a front of two or three miles, is the only place which you must keep butting at. About five or six divisions have been worn out going into these jaws. Of course, I do not know the ground or the battle conditions, but, looking at it from afar, it is puzzling why, if the enemy can be held and dominated at this point, no attacks can be made on the flanks. It seems very hard to understand why this most strongly defended point is the only passage forward," the prime minister wrote.

Churchill's bitterness was largely due to a personal predicament. The Italian campaign was his idea,

which took a great deal of stubbornness to push through against the US generals who would have preferred to invade northern France. The landing at Anzio was also Churchill's plan:

"Instead of hurling a wildcat on to the shore, all we got was a stranded whale."

A particular target of Churchill's sarcasm was the 22,000 Allied vehicles that should have carried landing troops to Rome, but were now at a standstill – surrounded by Germans in the tiny bridgehead.

"We must have a great superiority of chauffeurs. I am shocked that the enemy have more infantry than we," Churchill said bitterly.

The Germans had amassed 100,000 men against the 76,000 Allies who were now fighting for their lives in the bridgehead. Churchill's sympathy was not forthcoming. He refused to understand how much the mountains, rivers and wet spring weather could hamper the soldiers' advance in Italy.

Cassino awakened ghost of Somme

While Churchill grumbled in London, the fighting was winding down in Cassino. The Allies' third offensive had ended like the previous two, but their



DAYTONA BEACH MORNING JOURNAL

19th May 1944

Polish troops occupy Benedictine monastery; chapel still intact

WITH POLISH FORCES IN MONTE CASSINO ABBEY, 18th May.

Polish troops kept vigil tonight over the hallowed grounds of this monastery, founded by St Benedict and laid waste by the fury of modern war.

The great shrine was reached by Polish troops this morning as their British comrades of the 8th Army stormed into ancient Cassino down below. It was found to be a sorry hump of stone and dust.

Practically the only part of the stately old monastery which remained approximately in its former beauty was the chapel of St Benedict, which stood unshaken through devastating bombing by Allied air forces and through shelling by both armies.

Just before, a small party of Polish and British officers reached the summit of the hill which overlooks the great sweep of the valley before Cassino and planted the Polish and British flags on the highest point of rubble and stone which is now the abbey. The soldiers marched up a 30-foot-high rubble heap, reached the height of the second monastery and hoisted their flags in plain view of German troops in surrounding hills. A second

lieutenant, commander of the Polish platoon which reached the monastery this morning, was given the honour of raising the flags on two crude poles picked up on bloody battlefields below.

The monastery, founded in 529 by St Benedict to house a monastic order known for scholarly pursuits and the preservation of ancient records and manuscripts of the church, has almost ceased to exist – almost because 1,000 tonnes of bombs and thousands of rounds of shells have failed to destroy the lovely St Benedict chapel at the extreme north-west end.

Sordid trappings of the German army, mattresses, blankets, knapsacks, grenades and rifles, scattered about the floor mar the beauty of this once quiet holy spot.

Above the altar are the words "pax, pax" – peace, peace. In a loft that overlooks the chapel are paintings of virtues, with names below – "love of God, charity, discretion, patience and humility".

At the far end of the monastery was a circle marked "schweinestall", apparently used to keep pigs.

Looking down on the green valley from the ruined main entrance it seemed incredible that any military operation could make headway against such perfect observation.

positions were now right up against the Germans. The two enemies sometimes even occupied the same building, as one New Zealand soldier reported:

"They could hear the Germans moving about on the roof and next door, but could do nothing as all exits were covered by a German strongpoint across the street and grenade-dropping snipers on the roof."

A suffocating stench of unburied bodies and faeces hung in the air. The soldiers couldn't wash, because water was a precious commodity that had to be transported in under the cover of night. Even in the darkness, it was dangerous to move, because every sound in the rubble attracted hand grenades.

For the German commander on the Cassino front, Fridolin von Senger, the sight of the destruction was uncomfortably familiar. He had experienced the hell of the trenches during World War I:

"Wandering along the path across this battlefield to reach a battalion command post reminded me of the Somme in 1916; the same surface all covered by clods or ploughed by shelling, no wall, no tree unhurt, no human being to be seen, but hell ablaze with the crack of explosions and that particular smell in the air of hot iron and newly turned soil. I wonder what will be the verdict of history concerning those of us who are discerning, unbiased and strong enough to realise that defeat is inevitable and who nevertheless continue to fight and to contribute to the bloodshed."

Despite von Senger's anguish, the Germans refused to surrender in Cassino. Even Allied newspapers such as *The Times* reported how tenaciously the paratroopers fought in the inhumane conditions:

"Men of the 1 Parachute Division are seldom brought in as prisoners; they are that type of soldier who would rather fight and die than surrender, and when by chance one of them is brought in, he will say nothing," the paper reported.

French Army got the job done – again

April 1944 saw temperatures rise and the mud dry out, making it easier for units to move. Meanwhile, the Allies had sent even more troops to the Cassino front. The fourth offensive was on the horizon.

Alone on the 30-km stretch from Monte Cassino to the coast, ten Allied divisions were lined up when the order to attack was given on 11th May 1944. Among them were the French, who had been moved from the Apennines to the Aurunci Mountains on the coast. Now they numbered four divisions instead of two.

General Alphonse Juin stressed to his officers that speed would be crucial but the attack stumbled into German minefields, barbed-wire barriers and bunkers, from which machine-gun fire whipped out.

"My little group and I threw ourselves towards Point 739; we cared about only one thing: to reach as quickly as possible a ravine directly in front of▶"

Front-line reports lamented the monastery's destruction, but most, even the Catholic Church, expressed understanding of the attack.

Polish Troops Occupy Benedictine Monastery; Chapel Still Intact

By LYNN HEINZERLING
WITH POLISH FORCES IN MONTE CASSINO ABBEY, May 18.
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astle order known the world over for scholarly pursuits and the preservation of ancient records and manuscripts of the church, has almost ceased to exist – almost – because 1,000 tons of bombs and thousands of rounds of shells have failed to destroy the lovely St Benedict chapel at the extreme northwest end.

Sordid trappings of the German army, mattresses, blankets, knapsacks, grenades and rifles, scattered about the floor mar the beauty of this once quiet, holy spot.

Above the altar are the words "pax, pax" – peace, peace. In a loft which overlooks the

us. Having reached this refuge, I counted my men – five. I called out but my calls were drowned by the barrage. So be it! I moved forward again, followed by my group of five men, walking in serried formation like young partridges,” said a French officer leading a group of Moroccan soldiers in a desperate attack. Juin himself got right up to the front on a pony, which was better transport than cars in the rocky landscape. Juin was small and looked more like a good-natured mountain farmer than a field commander, and his right hand was useless after injuries sustained during World War I. But the general on his pony's back encouraged the troops to step up their efforts.

As always, the attack depended on the sacrifice of young French officers. A lieutenant whose Tunisian troops were about to advance was aware of this when he was shot in the hip. The wound didn't stop him:

“He refused to be evacuated. ‘I am going to stay with you,’ he said to an NCO. ‘We are going to push the Germans back – then I can die. That is of no consequence. I only ask that you send my wedding ring to my wife, and mark a cross for her on this map to show where I am going to die.’ Then, very calmly, he gave his orders. And for two hours more he led his section and threw back the Germans.”

The unit had captured its objective and forced a German counter-attack back when a shell finally ended the lieutenant's life. The French troops eventually took Monte Maio, which towered high above that section of the Gustav Line. With the German defences breached, Juin's soldiers could finally look down on the Liri Valley, which the Allied generals had been dreaming of storming for months.

The onslaught would soon begin, as the French breakthrough on the German flank had punctured the defences along the Rapido, allowing British tanks to cross. The paratroopers on Monte Cassino and in the town below were now at risk of being surrounded.

Polish bugle sounded over monastery

As the French, British and Americans struggled to break into the Liri Valley, another assault on Monte Cassino began. The dangerous task fell to the Poles this time, and they ran into the same murderous crossfire as other Allied troops before them. After 24 hours, they were ordered to wait for other forces to break through the Cassino front.

On 16th May, French and British forces broke through to the Liri Valley behind Monte Cassino. For the Poles, the breakthrough signalled the start of another attack. They began a slow capture of enemy positions until a German radio message suddenly changed the whole situation. A Polish artillery officer described how they realised victory was close after four months of futile fighting south of Rome.

“We intercepted a message in German. This time to the effect that the defenders were ordered to

withdraw from the abbey. I arranged a steady fire on all exit routes,” the officer said.

The Germans were retreating and on 18th May, Polish observers saw a tattered white flag fluttering in the wind over the monastery at Monte Cassino. Lieutenant Kazimierz Gurbel was ordered to lead a 12-man patrol to investigate. He met no resistance when he entered the ruin and captured 17 men in dirty, tattered uniforms. For the 26-year-old lieutenant, the victory evoked ambivalence:

“After all that fighting, all those months, the monastery was captured without a shot being fired.”

Shortly after, a Polish soldier played the ancient bugle call *Kraków Hejnał*. A sergeant witnessed how the battle-hardened soldiers were seized by the act.

“There was a lump in my throat as, through the echo of the cannon's roar, the notes of the Hejnał



STRENGTH RATIO

During the four battles of Monte Cassino, the German side had around

140,000

troops. On the Allied side, around

240,000

soldiers went into battle on the mountain slopes.

New Zealand forces rout the Germans and take Florence. The Nazis manage to blow up the city's historic bridges.

The Allies attack Italy's last major line of defence. But without the French mountain troops, they are unable to break the line.

Brazilian troops attack the Monte Castello position, which falls in March 1945 and opens the road to northern Italy.

rang out from the abbey. These soldiers, hardened by numerous battles, only too well acquainted with the shocking wastefulness of death on the slopes of Monte Cassino, cried like children, as, after years of wandering, they heard not from the radio, but from the previously invincible German fortress, the voice of Poland, the melody of the Hejnal."

The battle of attrition at Monte Cassino was over. At Anzio, the Allies also broke out of their beachhead. The advance towards the heart of Italy could begin.

Allied front-line correspondents poured into Cassino and up to the monastery. All wanted to get a glimpse of the battlefield and witness the captured German paratroopers who had managed to keep the more numerous Allied forces at bay for so long.

From there, reporters continued on the heels of the divisions marching into Rome on 4th June 1944. US

General Mark Clark had been dreaming of this moment for a long time. He was even accused of failing to surround fleeing German troops so that he and his US troops could reach Rome first. However, two days later, the Allies landed in Normandy and from that point on, the war in Italy was forgotten.

In Britain, some were starting to call the Allied soldiers in Italy the D-Day Dodgers. A bunch of slackers leading a leisurely campaign in the Mediterranean sun, while real men crushed Hitler's armies in northern France. During the Battle of Monte Cassino, around 55,000 Allied soldiers lost their lives compared to 20,000 German soldiers.

The mockery bred bitterness among the men who had been fighting since 1940, driving Rommel's Afrika Korps out of North Africa, and were then sent wave after wave into the Monte Cassino deathtrap. ■

Rome remained largely undamaged after World War II because the city was home to countless cultural treasures and the cradle of the Catholic Church.





Dramatic battles unfolded at Nijmegen on the road towards Arnhem and the Rhine. The bridge was the last one the Allies gained control of during Operation Market Garden.

The Netherlands, September 1944

BRIDGE OF DEATH IN ARNHEM

Almost everyone
had some sort of
dirty field dressing
and blood was
everywhere.

Captain Eric Mackay on the Battle of Arnhem.

Bridge of death in Arnhem

Nazi Germany was faltering and in September 1944, British Field Marshal Montgomery intended to deliver the death blow; 20,000 paratroopers would capture Dutch bridges so Allied tanks could cross the Rhine and continue into Germany. But Hitler's army was far from exhausted and the British were heading for a bloodbath.

By Esben Mønster-Kjær

Hitler's armies had been crushed in Normandy and the remnants were a pitiful sight. Allied forces were hot on their heels and by 3rd September, the British had taken Brussels in Belgium. The following day, they captured the strategically important port city of Antwerp on the Dutch border. The rapid advance raised hopes of the imminent collapse of Nazi Germany and sent the German forces into a chaotic retreat. The once proud soldiers looked like a

caravan of vagabonds as they raced east through southern Netherlands on foot or in stolen cars and on civilians' bicycles. A German supply officer described the panic of the Nazi occupation troops:

"When news arrived of the offensive with British tanks towards the southern Netherlands, an almost completely unplanned retreat of military and civil establishments led to some random looting [of transport]. Trains and vehicles, occupied by those fleeing, caused jams and were shot up by [Allied] ground-attack aircraft and set alight: in short, a very regrettable image



which unfortunately showed a lack of leadership and discipline."

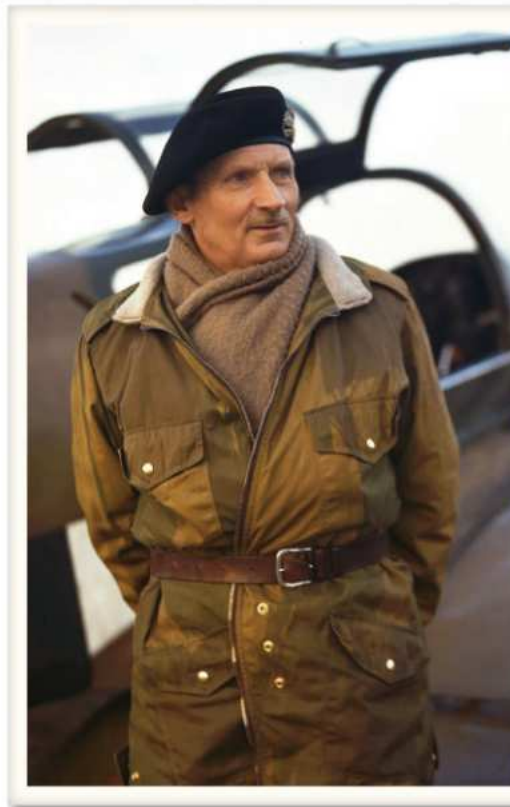
As the Germans fled, Dutch celebrations broke out on 5th September. *Dolle Dinsdag* – Mad Tuesday – saw people leave their workplaces to dance and sing in the streets, while in vain the occupying forces called for order. Many of the fleeing soldiers, like the Dutch, thought the end of the war was near. They had lost 400,000 comrades since the Allied landings in Normandy on 6th June, along with 1,300 tanks, 1,500 guns and 20,000 military vehicles. If the masses on the roads were to become an army again, the lost weaponry had to be replaced and fresh soldiers had to be brought into the ranks. For this task, Adolf Hitler had an ace up his sleeve. He reinstated the experienced Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, who in just a few days transformed the chaos into an effective line of defence along the bridges and long waterways of the lowlands.

Monty wanted victory by Christmas

In Allied HQ, the mood was almost as euphoric as that of the jubilant Dutch on Mad Tuesday. On their way to Brussels, British tanks had travelled 130 kilometres in 13 hours, and a lack of fuel was a far greater hindrance than any German resistance. The war would be over soon, many believed, and US generals were already making plans to move troops from Europe to the battlefields of Asia.

Amid the optimism, British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery devised a daring plan, Operation Market Garden, to bring victory within reach. He would send troops 100 km up the Dutch Highway 69 to capture a major bridge over the Rhine at the city of Arnhem. Then he wanted his forces to penetrate northern Germany and win the war before Christmas. The plan

A glider lies shattered on the ground as Allied forces are dropped behind enemy lines in the Netherlands during 1944's Operation Market Garden.



Bernard Montgomery won important victories in North Africa, Italy and Normandy, but the Netherlands proved a tougher nut to crack.

simply required plenty of fuel and paratroopers to take the many bridges along the route. Beyond that, however, Montgomery's staff failed to make detailed plans, his intelligence officer later admitted.

"We didn't work in the serious way we did for D-Day. We were in Brussels where we had parties and a gay time. Everyone worked, but the psychology was wrong," the officer recalled.

Montgomery got his fuel and one British and two US airborne divisions, whose crews also didn't take the mission very seriously – but for different reasons. The paratroopers had prepared for battle many times only to receive counter-orders, as British Major Geoffrey Powell explained:

"Since D-Day we had prepared for 16 different parachute operations. Some had been cancelled before the men had even been briefed, others as they were waiting for trucks to take them to the airfield. Some came to nothing because the forces on the ground moved too slowly, others because they'd swept forward too successfully."

As a huge air fleet prepared to take off from England, many soldiers in the British 1st Airborne Division hoped that this time they would see some action. Having missed D-Day, this operation might have been their last chance to play a role in the war.

Elite squads needed strong nerves

As many as 1,500 transport planes and close to 500 gliders took off on 17th September 1944 from ►



airfields in southern England in the airborne part of the operation, called Market. The sight of endless rows of planes gave the 20,000 men in the first wave of the attack a sense of invincibility. This also affected Major Geoffrey Powell, who didn't like jumping out of a plane – despite having jumped 30 times before.

"In fact, the drift down towards the ground after the parachute had opened was an experience unique in its blend of aesthetic delight and physical satisfaction. The distaste must lie in the unnatural act of throwing oneself through that door into space. It would never become routine, and I knew that most men in the battalion felt the same, whatever their overt attitudes."

However, Powell would rather jump than land with the gliders, which each carried 30 combat-ready soldiers in thin wooden hulls. In theory, the men could go into battle immediately after landing, while paratroopers arrived scattered and needed time to regroup. But Major Powell knew the risks of gliders:

"To lumber clumsily earthwards in such a flimsy plywood box always seemed not only frightening but also lacking in the compensating pleasures found in parachuting. To be crushed against a tree as the object crumpled into matchwood was an unpleasant prospect and a not infrequent occurrence."

Experience on D-Day showed that night operations led to too many navigational errors and chaos on the ground, so the drop had to be done in daylight. This gave the Germans clear targets to shoot at, and as soon as the air fleet crossed the Dutch coast just before 13.30, the anti-aircraft guns began their barrage. A number of Allied aircraft crashed, while the rest continued to the Arnhem area, where green lights in the planes signalled that it was time to jump.

Swarm of planes triggered alarm

The night before the operation, the Germans received a warning that an attack in the Netherlands was

imminent. Bombers attacked German airfields, and after sunrise, the British and Americans also struck the many gun positions around the target areas. At first, high-ranking German officers believed that the goal was to destroy important transport hubs, such as the bridge in Arnhem. But as the roar of thousands of aircraft engines filled the air at midday, the Allied plan became clear to the Germans.

"I stepped out on the balcony, and wherever I looked I could see aircraft-troop transports and aircraft towing gliders – flying quite low over our house. They came in groups and as one disappeared into the distance another one followed – flight after flight. It was a spectacle which impressed me deeply. At that particular moment I had no thought of the dangers it foreshadowed; I was only thinking of my own airborne operations in earlier days," said General Kurt Student, himself a former paratrooper.

West of Arnhem stood a weak SS battalion of 435 men. One of the soldiers was Private Karl Bangard, who'd witnessed air raid after air raid since morning. At around 13.40, the warning cry of "Paratroopers!" rang out. Large cargo planes pulled gliders close over the treetops as the battalion commander ordered his men to prepare to move out. Bangard recalled:

"In a feverish hurry, the last things were packed. Steel helmet on, weapon in hand and raus! A hail of gunfire hit the gliders, which came in at low altitude and swung in a curve to the left to land in the fields of Wolfheze. The roar of aircraft engines and firing of machine guns shook the ground."

In Arnhem's neighbouring village of Oosterbeek, panic set in. This was the headquarters of Army Group B, which was in charge of all German troops along the 400-km front line. Now they themselves were under attack. Generals, signallers, cooks and female secretaries had to jump into vehicles and dash away from the danger zone.

However, the enemy attack was too extensive for the headquarters alone to be the target. German commanders realised that the aircraft had to be heading for the strategically important bridge in Arnhem. All units in the Netherlands and north-west Germany were put on alert. But for now, only Karl Bangard and his few hundred fellow soldiers stood between the enemy and the bridge over the Rhine.

Americans had to clear the way

Two US divisions landed at the larger towns further south along the main road to Arnhem. Many were new recruits, but they were led by men with experience from the Normandy cauldron. The 101st Airborne Division hit the ground north of Eindhoven, 21 kilometres from the Allied front line in the Netherlands.

Their mission was to capture the bridges over the area's rivers and canals. A corporal observed how ►

Eindhoven's streets
filled with Dutch people
rejoicing after Allied
forces liberated the city
in the early days of
Market Garden.



Dared to kick down the door to Germany



The Rhine acted as a natural obstacle for Hitler's battered army to take refuge behind in September 1944. With Operation Market Garden, the Allies wanted to rob the Germans of their stronghold in one fell swoop.

British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery was known as a man who rarely took chances. But the fighting in Normandy had shattered the German forces, so he devised a bold plan to capitalise on the enemy's collapse. The goal was to capture a bridge over the Rhine in Arnhem in the Netherlands, 100 km behind the German front. Montgomery knew the Germans

would blow up all the river crossings in the city and along the route if the Allies approached by land. With Operation Market, Montgomery would therefore capture key points with paratroops. In Operation Garden, British tanks would then travel to Arnhem over four days. However, a lack of aircraft meant that three airborne divisions had to be dropped over two days, while the overland advance was made along a single main road, where jams easily built up and the column was vulnerable to attack. But these flaws were ignored, because no one expected significant resistance.



Pontoon bridges replaced bombed crossings but took precious time to build.



Dutch civilians flocked to help the wounded, carry equipment and even lead the way.

"The Dutch even gathered our 'chutes and placed them by the road for salvage, rather than scurrying off with them as the French so often did."

The parachutes were made of silk or the new material nylon, and could be sewn into smart dresses. The Dutch generally welcomed the liberators with joy and enthusiasm, whereas in France the population tended to stay indoors behind closed curtains.

The soldiers didn't make it into Eindhoven that day because the Germans blew up a bridge over a crucial canal north of the city. Fortunately, the centre pillar was still standing after the explosion, and if British engineering troops could build an emergency bridge across it, the tanks would be able to cross again.

Between Eindhoven and Arnhem lay Nijmegen, the target of the US 82nd Airborne Division. There, some units took a beating on the way down and retaliated against German gun crews, as a US private admitted:

"We got out of our 'chutes and headed for where we had seen the 20-mm gun battery. Four Germans stood by their guns, hands held high, shouting: 'Kamerad! Kamerad hell! They were cut to ribbons by Tommy guns and rifle slugs."

US soldiers captured several intact bridges outside Nijmegen. But then the division commander wasted precious time setting up positions to repel any counter-attacks. At this point, the large bridge over the Waal in the city centre was being defended by fewer than 50 men from several different German units. They had just been reinforced when US patrols finally approached in the evening. German gunfire sent the paratroopers fleeing.

Small groups sneaked towards Arnhem

To the north, the British prepared to take Arnhem and the Rhine bridges, the ultimate objective of the entire operation. The 1st Airborne Division numbered 10,000 men, but a third of the troops would stay to defend the drop zone, with another third not arriving until the next day, as the Allies didn't have enough

transport aircraft to deploy the entire force at once. Only one third would march the 13 km to the bridge. The air force refused to drop any closer to the target, which was well defended by anti-aircraft batteries.

The units were deployed as soon they were ready. Speed was of the essence, and it would take too long to organise the troops so they could advance together. At the village of Oosterbeek, the British ran into the defence line formed by Private Bangard's SS battalion:

"Soon mortars, machine-gun fire and rifle shots rang out as the first units of our battalion threw themselves against the British. A fierce battle broke out, but the enemy still advanced, for their superiority was still too great. This was the first time many of us came under fire."

British Colonel John Frost led his battalion of 750 or so men along the riverbank and around the SS soldiers. Soon the troops approached a large railway bridge crossing the Rhine between Oosterbeek and Arnhem. A lieutenant was leading his platoon forward to look for explosives when he saw a German soldier run on to the bridge from the opposite side.

"He got to the middle and I saw him kneel down and start doing something. I put one section down and told them to open fire. The range I gave the Bren gunner was 500 yards. With another section, I ordered a rush on the bridge," said the lieutenant.

The British had barely started running when there was an explosion and the central bridge span collapsed. Disappointed, Frost and his men continued towards the centre of Arnhem, where the road bridge was now the only crossing over the Rhine.

British ran into brick wall

While paratroopers fought at Arnhem, Nijmegen and Eindhoven, a rescue team set off south of the Dutch border. Tanks from the British Guards Armoured Division were immediately hit by German shells, quickly putting nine out of action, but then retaliation came from above. Colonel Joe Vandeleur was leading the vanguard and had called in air support:

"It was the first time I had ever seen Typhoons in action and, Jesus, I was amazed at the guts of those pilots. They came in one at a time, head to tail, and flew right through our own barrage. One disintegrated right above me. It was incredible – guns firing, the roar of planes, the shouts and curses of the men. In the middle of it all, Division asked how the battle was going. My second in command just held up the microphone and said, 'Listen.'"

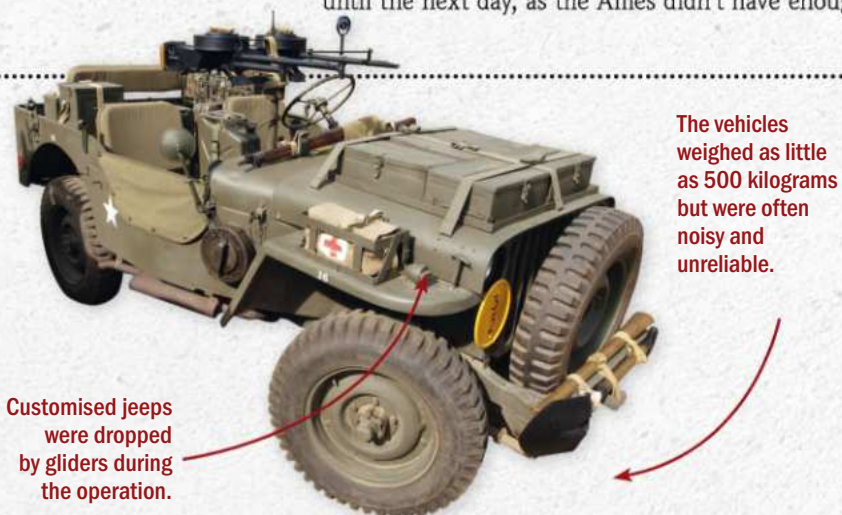
Tank commanders radioed that their own aircraft were strafing them. But it turned out to be nothing more than shell casings raining down on the tanks as pilots pulled the trigger above them. The German resistance was defeated and bulldozers pushed the damaged tanks out of the way. The column could then continue. According to the plan, the British ►

FACTS

During Operation Market Garden

41,628

troops were landed by parachute or glider. At the time, it was the largest airborne operation in history.



The vehicles weighed as little as 500 kilograms but were often noisy and unreliable.

Customised jeeps were dropped by gliders during the operation.

5/9

The Germans receive two decimated SS panzer divisions, which are randomly placed in Eindhoven and Arnhem.

7/9

Infantry, paratroopers and wounded troops form a line of defence at a canal along the border between the Netherlands and Belgium.

17/9

A patchwork of splintered divisions is placed in reserve throughout the Dutch hinterland.



Like giant targets,
*soldiers descended by
parachute to drop sites in
the Netherlands. D-Day
had shown that dropping
in daylight was safer.*

HOW...

...the offensive led to the fall of Berlin

Allied generals agreed that the way to Adolf Hitler's surrender was across the Rhine. Therefore, capturing a bridge far behind enemy lines was of utmost importance.

With Field Marshal Montgomery leading British troops in Western Europe, he went to his American superior, Dwight D Eisenhower, in September 1944 with a plan. He wanted to capture Arnhem, which, with its bridges over the Rhine, would open up the whole of northern Germany.

This would allow Allied troops to bypass the difficult 630-km-long Siegfried Line defences that fortified Germany to the west. The route would pave the way to the flat North German Plain, where Montgomery saw the possibility of a lightning advance to Berlin that could lead to the fall of Nazi Germany before Christmas 1944.

"I consider that we have now reached a stage where one really powerful and full-blooded thrust towards Berlin is

likely to get there and thus end the German war," wrote Bernard Montgomery in his post-war memoirs.

But Eisenhower was not convinced of Montgomery's strategy. He knew from intelligence reports that the Germans were still too strong. In his memoirs, Eisenhower wrote, "There was still a considerable reserve in the middle of the enemy country and I knew that any pencil-like thrust into the heart of Germany such as he proposed would meet nothing but certain destruction."

However, the US Army chief also wanted to get his hands on Arnhem's bridges. As the Allies opened more supply routes, Eisenhower hoped the crossings could be used to launch a massive invasion, targeting Germany's war industry in the Ruhr in particular.

would be able to cover the 21 km to Eindhoven in a few hours, but after the German attack, they advanced cautiously. They only made it eight kilometres before darkness forced them to stop for the night.

Allied advance failed

In Arnhem, Colonel Frost and his battalion reached the road bridge over the Rhine at 20.00. Two other battalions hadn't arrived as planned because they were still fighting the Germans in Oosterbeek. Frost was therefore left to fend for himself.

The Brits carefully sneaked up on the houses around the approach to the bridge. They warned horrified Dutch residents that they'd better hurry away as their homes would soon be in the line of fire. The buildings were then transformed into fortresses before a platoon of 30 men stepped on to the bridge. The soldiers silently edged their way along the girders supporting the bridge, but the Germans spotted them. Machine-gun fire from a bunker took out several Brits and sent the rest into a headlong retreat.

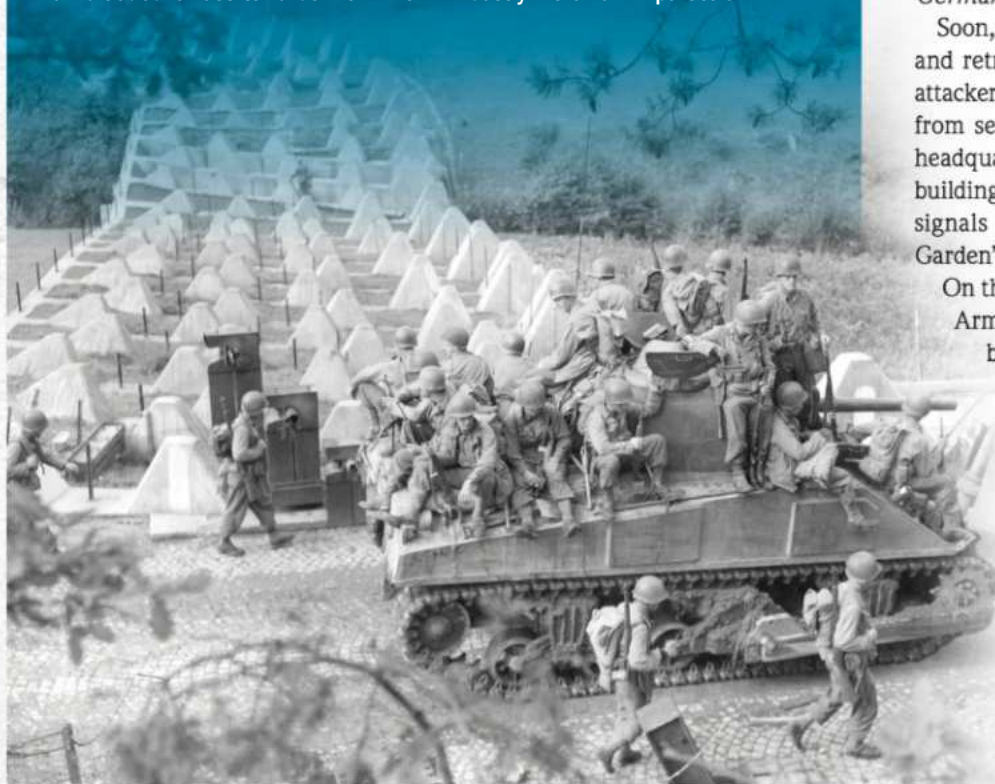
The British made another attempt to cross, but were again repulsed. Confused fighting then flared up inside Arnhem, with groups of German soldiers attacking the buildings the British had taken.

"We fought hand to hand in the rooms. One of them brought a machine gun and poked it right through the window spraying the room. I was standing there with my .45 and just pushed it in his mouth and pulled the trigger. It blew his head off, or all that was not held on by his chin strap. I grabbed the machine gun and turned it on the Germans outside," said British Captain Eric Mackay.

Soon, however, Mackay had to abandon the house and retreat to a neighbouring property, where the attackers had to defend themselves against pressure from several sides. They also had no contact with headquarters in the drop zone, because distance, buildings, trees and German jammers prevented radio signals from reaching them. Operation Market Garden's main objective hung in the balance.

On the second day, the tanks of the British Guards Armoured Division set off again. But it was 18.00 before the first scout vehicles rolled into Eindhoven, which US paratroopers had captured. The Dutch were celebrating in the streets and the column almost came to a standstill. Colonel Vandeleur edged

The Siegfried Line's bunkers, armoured trenches and dragon's teeth made an advance difficult. In September 1944, US troops broke through the defences for the first time, but were caught in heavy fighting in the forests behind the line.



It was terrible. The trenches were full of bodies. There were dead bodies everywhere. ■ SS soldier Horst Weber on the fighting in Arnhem.



The Germans in Arnhem soon realised what the Allies were planning, and the drop's element of surprise was lost.

his way through in an armoured car, then rushed north to the blown bridge over the Wilhelmina Canal. There, the colonel met a group of relaxed Americans:

"They were drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes. You would have never thought there was a war on, they were so completely relaxed. We said hello and they shuffled to their feet and gave us a few half-hearted salutes."

In the late evening, British engineering troops arrived to build a new bridge. They laboured through the night so the column could roll on in the morning.

Further north, constant small-scale attacks prevented the 82nd Airborne Division from taking Nijmegen. The German manoeuvres were designed to buy time while Gerd von Rundstedt and his general staff organised the defences along Highway 69. The Germans' strongest card was the remnants of two SS panzer divisions that the Allies had damaged in Normandy. Together they numbered 6,000 men and a paltry three tanks, but the unit had an effective command structure and discipline that could instil fighting ability in other units. Anti-aircraft troops, police, students from military schools and even military bands played a role in this defensive line.

Arnhem became an inferno

In the northernmost area of Operation Market Garden, an ominous calm descended during the

night. At the road bridge in Arnhem, Colonel John Frost ordered his men to be ready for a German assault at dawn. It was not until 09.00, however, that a lookout warned that a column of armoured cars was crossing the bridge from the south. In a moment of optimism, Frost hoped that the vehicles belonged to the British Guards Division and had come to the rescue sooner than expected.

The vehicles were German, however, and four got through. In response, the British opened fire with small arms, machine guns and anti-tank weapons, whose shots quickly filled the bridge with bodies and flaming wreckage. A group of German soldiers attempted to cross the bridge on foot, only to be targeted by an accurate sniper on a roof.

"Several German infantrymen tried to cross the bridge, but from my observation post I couldn't miss. Killed six as they tried to cross the roadblock along the banister of the bridge. Then someone spotted me. A sniper's bullet came through the window and glanced off my helmet, but glass and splinters from the window were in my eyes," said the lieutenant behind the rifle.

The shooting died down and from their entrenchments, the British, who had previously fought in North Africa, uttered the battle cry *"Whoa Mohammed!"* which the soldiers had learnt while fighting in Muslim countries. Frost's men put up a ►

fight, but lacked the ammunition and reinforcements necessary to hold out against the Germans. Two newly arrived battalions attempted to come to the rescue, but were caught in an ambush. No help got through to Arnhem that day as it had to fight its way from the south along Highway 69. There, the British Guards Armoured Division passed through Nijmegen 36 hours late on Wednesday 20th September, after US paratroopers had captured the city's bridges. Hitler was furious that German troops had not blown them up in time and had given the enemy an advantage.

North of Nijmegen, however, the worst possible landscape for an armoured advance awaited. Tank crews shuddered when they saw the route following the top of a dyke surrounded by marshy lowlands. If the column came under fire there, they would have no way to leave the road and take cover. Montgomery had been warned about this stretch of road by the commander of the Free Dutch Forces, but the British field marshal hadn't listened. Now the order *"Don't stop for anything"* was given as the spearhead of the armoured division advanced towards Arnhem.

As the road filled with burning tanks, the plan had to be changed. Only infantry could progress along the dyke, further delaying the advance. Rundstedt's defences were also pressing against both sides of the route the mission had paved through the Netherlands.

Fighting on the streets of Arnhem

As the armoured advance stalled, on 20th September Colonel Frost's forces ran out of ammunition. Captain Eric Mackay looked at the paratroopers around him. The men had now fought the German counter-attack without pause for three long days.

"I was sick to my stomach every time I looked at them. Haggard, with bloodshot and red-rimmed

eyes, almost everyone had some sort of dirty field dressing and blood was everywhere," Mackay said. The British had also run out of drinking water and were quenching their thirst with drips from radiators. Little by little, they lost control of the buildings closest to the Rhine bridge, allowing the Germans to use the crossing to move troops. Frost was also badly wounded by a mortar shell. After sunset, he issued a bitter order before handing over command to another officer: 100 uninjured and lightly wounded men were to retreat to a few houses, while he and hundreds of injured soldiers had to surrender.

The next day, several small groups tried to flee the city and join the rest of the division. A lieutenant put himself at the head of a group that wanted to escape a burning house and attack the Germans.

"I took a dozen or so and told them to fix their bayonets and we charged them. They were in a back garden and they got up and ran before we reached them. We were shouting 'Whoa Mohammed' and I think we scared more of them to death than we actually killed with bullets," said the British lieutenant.

However, the majority were quickly captured by the Germans, who scoured the ruined landscape. One of the searchers was SS soldier Horst Weber:

"It was terrible. The trenches were full of bodies. There were dead bodies everywhere. Going past two bodies, I turned around to glance at them casually – and I met their eyes. I covered them with my pistol and smiling I said to them, 'Good morning, gentlemen. Shall I bring you your breakfast now?'"

After three months of defeat after defeat, the Germans were comfortable with the reversal of roles.

The Wehrmacht gained full control of Arnhem and was free to blow up the bridge over the Rhine if the Allies got too close again. Operation Market Garden had failed, but the battle was not over. The remnants of the British 1st Airborne Division were trapped near Oosterbeek on the north side of the Rhine, desperately fighting back as the Germans closed in from all sides.

Major Geoffrey Powell was in a house that the British had transformed into a fortress. The windows were smashed to avoid flying shards of glass, and the owner's bookshelves acted as barricades. A stray enemy shell flew over the house on the morning of 21st September and hit German positions.

"My spirits rose a little. They were shelling their own troops. Soon, however, they would discover their error," Powell remembered.

But then another shell followed, and then a full volley. Powell realised the shelling was British and coming from the opposite side of the Rhine. Rescue was close at hand. Perhaps the division would escape the deathtrap after all. The mood lightened among the soldiers in the fortified house, but shots and explosions from fierce battles sounded nearby, and a few times German soldiers on the run could be seen ►

Fighting continued in the villages and forests around Arnhem, even after hope of help from the south had been extinguished.





RADIO MESSAGE TO HIGH COMMAND

24th September 1944

The last cry from Arnhem

British paratroopers had been surrounded in buildings around Arnhem for seven dreadful days. Roy Urquhart was the troops' commander and in a radio message he pleaded with his superiors for urgent help.

Operation Market Garden had gone horribly wrong for the British 1st Airborne Division. Its mission was to take Arnhem and its bridges over the Rhine and defend them for four days until help arrived.

Only a small part of the division reached the city, where German forces surrounded and defeated the British. The rest of the

division was cut off west of Arnhem, where it defended against attacks from all sides. After seven days, help had not arrived. The situation did not surprise Major General Roy Urquhart, who had already warned his boss, General Frederick Browning, before the drop: "Sir, you've ordered me to plan this operation and I have done it, and now I wish

to inform you that I think it is a suicide operation."

By now, Urquhart's 10,000 men had dwindled to a band of desperate survivors. On 24th September 1944, he sent Browning a last-ditch radio message to say that backup had to come immediately or the defeat at Arnhem would be total.

MESSAGE FORM

ARMY FORM C128 (Small)

Cal: e Del. No. 01V 10155 to 10155

Priority

Transmission Instructions: 2 1/2

Register No. 521

ABOVE THIS LINE FOR SIGNALS USE ONLY

FROM (A) 15 1st Airborne Division

TO (W) For Information (ISFO) 15 1st Airborne Division

Originator's No. 15 1st Airborne Division

THIS MESSAGE MAY BE SENT AS WRITTEN OR IN CIPHER

ORIGINATOR'S INSTRUCTIONS

THI or TOR

LOSSES: Troops were suffering from "lack of rations, water, ammunition", while several officers had died.



DESPERATION: Urquhart's men faced defeat – "unless physical contact is established with us early 25th September, consider it unlikely we can hold out".

INSTABILITY: According to the Major General, "even slight enemy offensive action may cause complete disintegration". In the event of collapse, Urquhart ordered his men to flee rather than surrender.

MESSAGE FORM

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ORIGINATOR'S INSTRUCTIONS

THI or TOR

SURROUNDED: Since day one, Urquhart had been trapped: "Any movement at present in face of enemy not possible. Have attempted our best and will do so as long as possible."

MESSAGE FORM

ARMY FORM C128 (Small)

Cal: e Del. No. 01V 10155 to 10155

Priority

Transmission Instructions: 2 1/2

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ORIGINATOR'S INSTRUCTIONS

THI or TOR



V-2

LONG-DISTANCE ROCKET

New weapon spread terror in London

Market Garden was intended to win bridges over the Rhine. As a bonus, the Allies hoped the Germans would leave the Netherlands, so V-2 rockets could no longer be fired at London from there.

A new era in the history of warfare began on 8th September 1944, when German V-2 rockets took to the skies, passing through the layers of the atmosphere and striking London and Paris. Enemy nations could now attack distant cities without risking the lives of aircraft and pilots. The largely civilian victims had no warning because the rockets fell at three times the speed of sound, so no alarm system was fast enough to detect them in time.

The British were trying to figure out how to stop Hitler's terrifying new weapon. Jammers were designed to disrupt radio waves, because initially the Allies believed the Germans could control the V-2s with long-range transmitters. Experts calculated that 320,000 shells would have to be fired to defend against one rocket, which would cause more damage than the V-2 itself. The only viable solution was to drive the Germans out of the Netherlands so that the V-2 rockets could no longer be fired close enough to reach London.

During Operation Market Garden, the mission succeeded and the bombardment of London with V-2 rockets ceased. Subsequently, 1,664 rockets landed in

Belgium. In particular, the Germans targeted Antwerp, the location of the Allies' main supply base in autumn 1944.

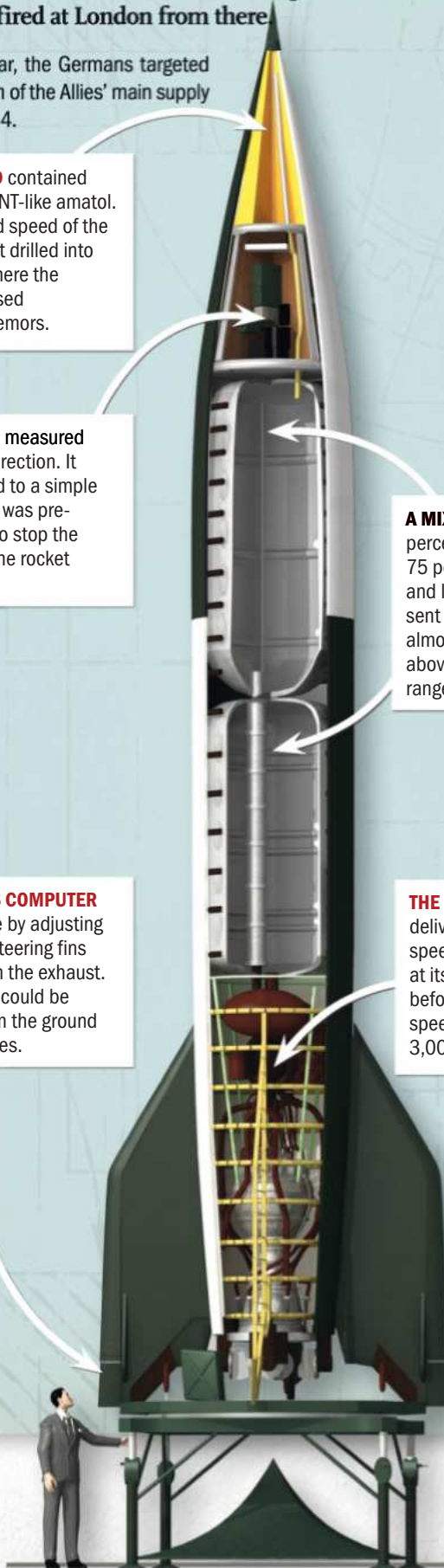
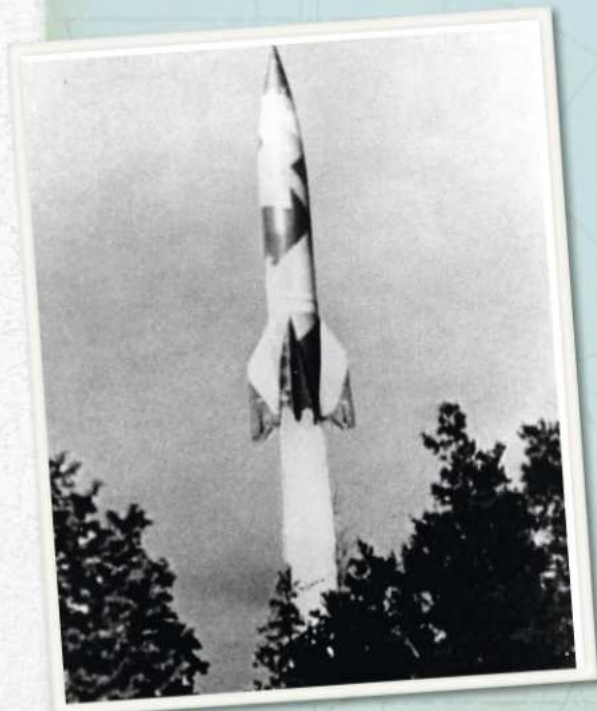
THE WARHEAD contained one tonne of TNT-like amatol. The weight and speed of the rocket meant it drilled into the ground, where the explosion caused devastating tremors.

A GYROSCOPE measured altitude and direction. It was connected to a simple computer that was pre-programmed to stop the engine when the rocket began its dive.

A MIXTURE of 25 percent water and 75 percent ethanol and liquid oxygen sent the rocket almost 100 km above the ground. Its range was 320 km.

THE ROCKET'S COMPUTER kept its course by adjusting four external steering fins and four fins in the exhaust. Later versions could be controlled from the ground with radio waves.

THE ENGINE delivered a top speed of 5,750 km/h at its highest. Just before impact, the speed was almost 3,000 km/h.



from the windows. Eventually, calm descended. In the silence, projectiles hit the building from behind.

"Were we isolated now, stuck out here by ourselves? Had the troops to the flanks pulled back or been wiped out? For the time being I kept these doubts to myself, but it seemed certain that the Germans had surrounded us," said Major Powell.

After dark, he set out to find the rest of his unit, taking a group of wounded with him. The rest had to stay and continue the fight, whether surrounded or not. Meanwhile, a desperate plan took shape to get as many soldiers as possible across the river to safety.

Air action to minimise defeat

The Battle of Arnhem had been raging for more than a week when Montgomery called off the mission on 25th September. He authorised the withdrawal of the survivors of the 1st Airborne Division back across the Rhine before the force was completely wiped out. Later that day, Powell broke the news to his men:

"I could see the disappointment in their weary, bloodshot eyes. They had seen their mates killed or maimed, the battalion had been wiped out, and even now their chances of escaping alive were remote. Yet they were not to be given the consolation of seeing the tanks and infantry of the Second Army driving northwards through the shattered streets."

That night, the paratroopers had to move to the riverbank in small groups. A few troops stayed behind so that the Germans don't notice the escape. A heavy bombardment would also mislead the enemy into thinking that a major attack was coming. After sunset, the British set off and reached the Rhine with 15 men. There they were met by a collapsible boat manned by a lone Canadian.

"Shells were dropping into the river around us. If the boat overturned, we wouldn't stand a

chance. Exhausted as we were, our boots and clothing would soon drag us under water. Drowning was something new to face, and we were so very close to safety now. Then the boat was grounding," said Powell, whose men hurriedly stumbled ashore.

As daylight made evacuation impossible, the rearguard was still trapped, as were hundreds of wounded. Their fate was in German hands. The British 1st Airborne Division was finished as a fighting unit. Of the 10,000 men who'd landed at Arnhem, only a quarter remained. Several had gone into hiding with the help of Dutch civilians and later resurfaced, but the units never saw combat again. Unusually, Montgomery admitted that he'd underestimated the challenges. However, he believed the operation was 90 percent successful. The survivors saw it differently:

"It had all been a pointless waste," said Major Geoffrey Powell.

A rumour later emerged that the Americans had never had any faith in the plan. They had allegedly refused to take on the attack on Arnhem itself, instead hand-picking less risky missions in Eindhoven and Nijmegen. Eisenhower's chief of staff denied that national interests had influenced the strategy. He claimed that even though the US hadn't dictated the approach, he was glad it had been done that way, explaining that the political repercussions in the US would have been catastrophic if an American airborne division had been blown to pieces by a British plan.

The Allies had mistakenly believed that the defeat of Germany was only a matter of fuel and bombs. But Market Garden showed that the Germans' resilience was far from exhausted. For both soldiers and Dutch civilians, the nightmare was far from over. ■

STRENGTH RATIO

In the fighting around Arnhem, **approximately**

1,300

German troops died, while British forces lost

1,984

paratroopers to German bullets. A further 6,854 were taken prisoner.

Paratroopers march towards German prison camps. Colonel John Frost was hospitalised and survived the war in German captivity.





The Netherlands, winter 1944-45

In September 1944, Nazi Germany disrupted the supply of food to cities in the Netherlands. For the next eight months, famine plagued the population.

HUNGRY HOLLAND

The situation must deteriorate rapidly. I fear we may be soon in the presence of a tragedy.

Winston Churchill on the Hunger Winter in the Netherlands.

In September 1944, the Dutch government in exile was convinced that it wouldn't be long before the Allies kicked the Germans out of the country. They therefore ordered a railway strike to paralyse German troop transports to the front. But liberation never came, and the Dutch soon felt the Nazis' revenge.

By Esben Mønster-Kjær

Allied paratroopers descended in droves around the Dutch cities of Eindhoven, Nijmegen and Arnhem on 17th September 1944. Meanwhile, armoured forces broke through the German lines on the southern border. The belief grew among the Dutch that liberation was near, and Dutch Prime Minister Pieter Gerbrandy, in London, decided the occupied people had to act at such a crucial moment. Via the government in exile's mouthpiece, Radio Oranje, the citizens learned how that same day:

"Here is an important message from the Dutch government. On account of a request received from Holland, and after consultation with the Supreme Command, the government is of the opinion that the moment has come to give instructions for a railway strike, in order to hinder enemy transport and troop concentrations."

The Germans were moving troops and supplies along the Dutch railways, so a strike would affect their efforts in the battle for the important bridge in Arnhem, according to the assessment, which also believed the Nazis would react with anger and make the entire Dutch population suffer for as long as the trains were at a standstill. Nevertheless, the Dutch decided to take up the fight and made the decision knowing full well what the consequences might be, as a young pastor, Adrian van Kaam, explained:

"We were aware of what a disaster this decision would create, especially for city centres in the west like The Hague. God help us if the landings at Arnhem failed to liberate us. Our main means of transport of the food and fuel necessary for survival would be halted. The lines of exchange among resistance groups would be lost and all connections in the country would be broken."

The Dutch government in exile, the country's railway workers and the resistance movement were betting everything on the fact that liberation was close. But when the fighting in Arnhem came to a standstill and the Allied troops were forced to retreat, the fate of the Dutch was sealed. As autumn turned to winter, it was clear to every hungry Dutch citizen that their fight had only just begun.

Workers were executed

The management of the Dutch railway company Nederlandse Spoorwegen was expecting the order to

strike. They accepted the high price they and their employees would pay by standing up to the occupying forces. But the workers themselves also willingly took part in the defiant action, as van Kaam recalled:

"The result was astonishing. Only 1,500 to 2,000 of the 30,000 employees refused to risk their income, their safety and that of their families. It was an unheard of, daring challenge to the Wehrmacht."

German officers in the Netherlands received the news of the railway company's strike with mixed reactions. SS and police leader Hanns Albin Rauter, head of the country's repressive administration, even considered the cancelled train service to be beneficial. The railway was not only important to the Germans, it was also the most important line of communication between cities for the Dutch resistance movement.

The country's Reich commissioner and Hitler's representative, Arthur Seyss-Inquart, like Rauter, also hailed from Austria, but they loathed each other and couldn't agree on anything. In Seyss-Inquart's eyes, the strike was an open challenge to German supremacy, which was already reeling from events at the front. As early as 18th September, he therefore issued a proclamation warning about the strike.

"They suppose very naively that Holland's problems have been solved but, in the interest of us all, we hope that they'll wake up and realise that they in fact are doing everything to bring a terrible disaster on their families and compatriots," read the Reich commissioner's verdict on the railway workers' illegal strike and the possible consequences.

Few Dutch people read the proclamation, however, because most of the country's newspapers refused to print it. This was also the case when Seyss-Inquart attempted a more menacing tone three days later:

"If the railwaymen don't return to work, a large part of the Dutch population is threatened with starvation."

Berlin immediately demanded that the trains start running, because they were carrying Hitler's V1 and V2 weapons to launch sites on the Atlantic coast, where the rockets were expected to turn the tide of war. As a result, German troops began to capture and execute railway workers to threaten the rest into obedience. Often, however, the Germans were too late, as a young boy, Dirk Marinus, discovered:

"My father (a stationmaster on the railways) was now advised to leave home and go in hiding, and

with the assistance of the resistance movement found a place with a farming family in the province. Little did my mother and myself realise that within a week we would also be told to leave the house and go into hiding. The resistance also found a place for us. We went to a farm near Bolsward, a very small town about 20 kilometres from where we lived."

However, patriotism was not the only reason why railway workers went on strike so willingly. With the front line running through the country and the rail network carrying German supplies, Allied air raids made working on the trains a deadly profession.

Nazis struck back against Netherlands

The job of running the trains was handed over to staff from Nazi Germany's Deutsche Reichsbahn (the German state railway), who concluded that they didn't have enough men to continue transporting civilian food from the countryside to the cities. The Allied advance had also cut off imports from Western Europe, and the Germans had shrunk the Netherlands' own food production by flooding large areas of farmland.

Reich Commissioner Seyss-Inquart saw the chance to stick the knife in. Shortly after, he also closed all freight traffic ►

German propaganda tried to intimidate workers back to work. "Striking only brings misery to your own people," it warned.

HOW...

...the railway strike affected Nazi warfare

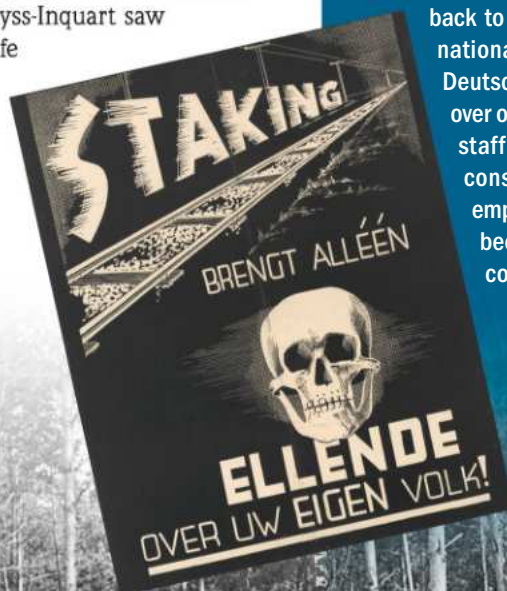
When the Allies launched an attack on Arnhem in September 1944, Dutch railway workers downed tools. The Germans now had to drive the trains themselves, carrying supplies to the front.

In the Netherlands, the Germans relied heavily on trains to transport weapons and supplies to the front. So, when Dutch railway workers decided to support the Allied advance in 1944, it was a disaster. Over 27,000 out of a workforce of 30,000 men left their jobs and went underground so the Germans couldn't force them back to work. Nazi Germany's national railway company, Deutsche Reichsbahn, took over operations, although its staff in the Netherlands consisted of just 500 employees whose role had been to supervise Dutch colleagues. Now they

faced a huge task. According to one analysis, the troops at the front could be kept supplied if 5,000 workers were brought in from Germany. Of course, such numbers couldn't be rustled up straight away, but the army could manage without trains for a short period.

When train services resumed, the strike had no impact on the Allied advance at Arnhem, for example. However, the authorities in Berlin took the situation seriously. The trains were carrying Hitler's V-2 rockets to launch sites on the Dutch coast, so they had to be kept moving at all costs. Towards the end of the war, the rail network in Western Europe increasingly became an Allied target.

Eight hundred V-2 rockets rolled from factories to launch pads in the Netherlands in February 1945.





Bans led to freezing to death

On top of the threat of a severely inadequate food supply, the Netherlands' situation in the winter of 1944-45 was further exacerbated by severe cold and the use of solid fuel, such as wood and coal, being prohibited.

When hunger struck the Netherlands in September 1944, it didn't come alone. In addition to the total lack of food, wood and other fuel quickly became scarce, too, worsening the food shortage. Not only could the population not cook food over a fire without fuel, but many risked dying of cold

without a fire or wood-burning stove as a heat source. The shortage became fatal when the use of solid fuel was banned in the western Netherlands.

Risking their lives, under the cover of night the cities' inhabitants secretly cut down the trees that lined the canals and stripped

houses belonging to deported Jews of all combustibles, to such an extent that parts of the buildings collapsed. However, not everyone was able to stay warm during the unusually cold winter. Exactly how many of the 20,000 or so victims of the Hunger Winter died from the cold is unknown.

SELF-HELP: The Dutch authorities introduced district advisers, after the experience of World War I. Their task was to help the population in the best way possible by advising the occupying power on Dutch-specific issues. Here the district adviser introduced a "consumption ban on solid fuels", based on a German decree.

Verbruiksverbod VASTE BRANDSTOFFEN

De Districts-Adviseur ZH II van het Rijkskolenbureau;
Gelet op het Besluit Noodorganisatie Vaste Brandstoffen;
Belast met de leiding van de voorziening van vaste
brandstoffen in het gebied van de Brandstoffen-Commissie
's-Gravenhage en de Brandstoffen-Commissie Wassenaar;

Heeft besloten te bepalen:

Met ingang van heden is het een ieder in de navolgende
gemeenten:

**'S-GRAVENHAGE, RIJSWIJK,
VOORBURG EN WASSENAAR,**

verboden vaste brandstoffen te verbruiken,

tenzij hij in het bezit is van een daartoe strekkende
schriftelijke vergunning, welke door mij is afgegeven.

Aan deze vergunning kunnen voorwaarden of beperkingen
worden verbonden.

's-Gravenhage, den 11 SEP 1944
De Districts-Adviseur ZH II van het Rijkskolenbureau,
J. DE KEYZER

SUBURBS: The ban applied in the suburbs of Rijswijk, Voorburg and Wassenaar in The Hague; the same ban was imposed in major cities in the western Netherlands, including Rotterdam and Amsterdam.

EXCEPTION: Some people could use fuel if they got a written authorisation from the district adviser. But even the authorisation could have limitations.

via rivers and canals, giving the Netherlands a deadly ultimatum: either the railway workers return to their jobs or the cities would starve to death.

The Dutch had staked everything on the entire country being liberated by winter. But in late September 1944, the dream of freedom came crashing down. The Nazi occupiers were still in the country and the railway strike hadn't driven the Germans out. Some members of the Dutch government in exile wanted to get the trains running again, but Gerbrandy refused. He'd initiated the strike, as requested by the Allied High Command.

What's more, Queen Wilhelmina had only put him in charge of the government in exile because he wouldn't bow to Hitler. Instead, Gerbrandy began a race to provide food for the Dutch and hasten the country's liberation. On 5th October 1944, he paid a visit to Churchill, with whom he had an excellent relationship. The British prime minister had taken a liking to his Dutch colleague, who seemed almost comical with his short stature and falsetto voice, but who had impressed everyone by standing up to Nazi Germany. During the meeting, Gerbrandy shared reports from his home country, which Churchill's personal assistant Desmond Morton summarised:

"He made a strong point that ... the Allied liberators might find the people of western Holland not only without food, but also without water, fuel, heat, light or sanitation. According to Gerbrandy's information, the Germans want to destroy methodically Dutch towns and villages, independent of any strategic aim, and have already begun this beastly process." Gerbrandy also told Churchill that the Dutch people could survive until 1st December but *"after that they would starve if conditions remained the same"*.

However, after the defeat at Arnhem, the Allies had abandoned all plans for a Dutch campaign. The strategy now was to invade Germany, depose Hitler and liberate German-occupied Europe. To placate his visitor, Churchill promised to take up the matter with the Allied generals. Perhaps the Netherlands would be liberated before 1st December, he suggested in as non-committal terms as possible. In his minutes from the meeting, Morton took the problem more seriously and predicted that a terrible sight would greet the Allied soldiers when they did liberate the Netherlands.

Gerbrandy made suggestions of how to feed his countrymen. He asked the Allies to allow supplies from neutral countries such as Switzerland and Sweden to pass through to the Netherlands. Churchill didn't like the idea because the food would also benefit German troops. He also harboured a stubborn belief that citizens of mainland Europe ate far better than the British. He might have been correct about countries such as Denmark, but in the Netherlands, with Nazi Germany as its only trading partner, the

In the cold of winter, civilians knitted clothes from dog hair.



This jumper was knitted using hair from a Keeshond dog. The hair had been collected over several years.

people had been struggling with scarcity since the start of the war. Now things were about to get worse.

A week's food lasted three days

Before the war, the Dutch lived well, consuming an average of 3,000 calories a day, but the occupation drove this down to 1,700. After the train strike and canal blockade, calorie intake plummeted in October.

"Each Thursday there was published the list of the coupon-numbers that were valid for the next week's food. One planned to divide that food over the week. The ordinary person, however, often consumed in two or three days all that was given for the whole week. Consequently, there was an enforced fast for four days until the next rations were available. This seriously aggravated the situation," read a report by nutritionists to the Allied High Command.

Eleven-year-old Hans Muller lived with his family in the city of Amsterdam, located in the densely

Skirmishes over firewood broke out in the streets as houses were dismantled despite bans. Abandoned Jewish houses were particularly vulnerable.





Children looked for food in rubbish bins to find sustenance. Despite the winter cold, many youngsters didn't wear shoes or trousers.

populated west of the Netherlands, where the food scarcity was at its greatest.

"Food rations consisted of sugar beets, tulip bulbs, industrial-grade potatoes and bread made of ingredients that you would hesitate to use as fodder for cattle. I myself suffered for some time of hunger oedema, but our father succeeded in finding supplementary food by trading a few hoarded cigars, some bars of soap, tea (by the teaspoon) and coffee for flour, cheese, milk and oats. Later, soup kitchens opened but the quality of that soup became more and more a danger for what remained of your health," the young boy recounted afterwards.

Hunger was the Dutch's biggest problem, but not the only one. After traffic ground to a halt across the country, many other everyday necessities disappeared. Lack of soap led to poor hygiene, which opened up the threat of infections and contagious diseases. However, many people were particularly affected by the lack of fuel as the cold winter months approached.

"No electricity, no gas, no coal, only some soft peat for cooking and heating. Notwithstanding the strict curfew, the beautiful trees along the canals disappeared rapidly during the night, as did the

impregnated wooden block pavement between the tram rails. But that was extremely dangerous, you could be shot on sight by the military police or their armed Dutch collaborators. The houses left by the Jewish community were also stripped of anything that could burn, and my grandfather, a retired cabinet maker, used most of his wooden tools and precious wood reserve in the kitchen stove to cook sugar beets and rye porridge. Miraculously, water supply was maintained although pressure was low," said Hans Muller, who, along with 4.5 million of his fellow countrymen, could look forward to being cold for a long time to come.

Women went on illegal hunger trips

Although the railway workers were still on strike, the German Reich Commissioner Arthur Seyss-Inquart abandoned his blockade in early November. However, this concession changed little for the Dutch. After six weeks of closed waterways, the food supply chains had collapsed and people living in the cities had to make so-called hunger trips to the countryside, where they tried to obtain food illegally, circumventing the rationing system. A Dutch woman received a tip that she could

The farmers would not give anything for money and therefore the people gave their last shoes, their last coat, just for a little bit of food. ■ Margaret von Lenip on the famine.

have half a pig if she could pick it up herself. However, the journey was difficult, as her daughter recalled:

"The farm was on the other side of the Maas. She took her old bike out of the shed and, even though it had no tyres, set off. Guards were posted at the bridges – they were mainly older men. She was allowed to cross. It must have been noisy riding over cobblestones on a bike without tyres. She got the half pig and put it over the handlebars. On the way back, the previous guard had been replaced by another. He saw my mum on her bike and shouted: 'Halt!' She started crying and making a fuss: 'I beg you, let me go home. I am a widow (true), I have 12 children (not true) and they are hungry and sick from lack of food.' The guard looked at her, then he let her pass," recounted the daughter.

Because able-bodied men risked being arrested and made to work in the war industry in Germany, it fell to the women to go on the dangerous hunger trips. The vast majority returned home with modest booty that could barely be called food. Tulip bulbs, in particular, become part of the daily diet, either boiled or ground and used as flour in a type of bread.

Freed cities left to fend for themselves

1st December arrived with no sign of liberation in sight for the Dutch, and during the Christmas period, hunger took hold and the death toll rose significantly.

It wasn't until 28th January 1945 that a small ray of hope appeared on the horizon. The Swedish ships *Dagmar Bratt* and *Norreg* reached the Dutch coast with 3,700 tonnes of bread and supplies on board. Churchill had finally agreed to let neutral countries come to the aid of the Netherlands. It took a whole month to get everything on barges and moved to the big cities in the west, where rations could be increased – but only for a week. After that, it was business as usual. The British prime minister was willing to let a few ships through, but did not allow any of the regular transportation. Meanwhile, the Allies built up stocks so that an aid programme could be launched once Nazi Germany was defeated. Soon, however, another crisis thwarted the plans.

Hunger was raging not only in the part of the Netherlands that was still occupied by the Germans. South of the front line, the roads were full of Allied lorries bringing food to the soldiers, while civilians along the route went to bed hungry. In fact, the people of southern Netherlands and northern Belgium had lived better under German occupation than after their liberation.

Starving citizens rummaged through rubbish or tried to barter for a meal. Anything could be traded, US soldier Roscoe Blunt realised, as he cooked over a fire near the town of Heerlen, when a girl approached.

"She ... matter-of-factly asked me if I wanted to 'ficken' [screw] or just 'kuszen' [kiss]. It took a few moments for my brain to click into gear and realise

what she was asking," said Roscoe, who discovered that the girl was only 12 years old.

Strikes broke out in the coal mines and in the Belgian port city of Antwerp, where workers unloaded tonnes of supplies from Allied ships every day but could not feed themselves. If railway workers on the Allied side of the front also walked out, the war effort would be seriously compromised.

As commander-in-chief, General Dwight D Eisenhower had to deal with the problem. The American decided to empty the stocks of relief supplies destined for the occupied part of the Netherlands. Eisenhower, well aware of the problems this decision could cause in the future, contacted the authorities in Washington and asked for their help.

"Unless these withdrawals are replaced, the whole relief plan for Western Holland is jeopardised," the army leader warned.

In concrete figures, Eisenhower asked for 109,000 tonnes of food and other supplies, which were inherently difficult to obtain – and just as difficult to transport. But while Allied aid slightly improved the situation south of the front, things grew worse in the north. During the winter of 1944-45, the calorie content of the Dutch daily ration dropped to 630 calories, and starvation was a reality. Allied dietary experts described a horrifying situation:

"In spite of this local organisation and effort, conditions became worse. People dropped from exhaustion in the streets and many died there. Often people were so fatigued that they were unable to return home, before curfew; so they hid in barns or elsewhere to sleep and there died. Older people, who lacked the strength to go searching for food, stayed at home in bed and died. The worst cases were hidden in the homes and being unknown to the physicians could not be treated."

Dutch doctors were not only overburdened with acutely malnourished patients, but also several co-morbidities. The most common was oedema, fluid retention in the body, and many also suffered from breathing problems. Deadly typhoid had been found ►

FACTS

Germany used Dutch labour in its industry. During the war,

500,000

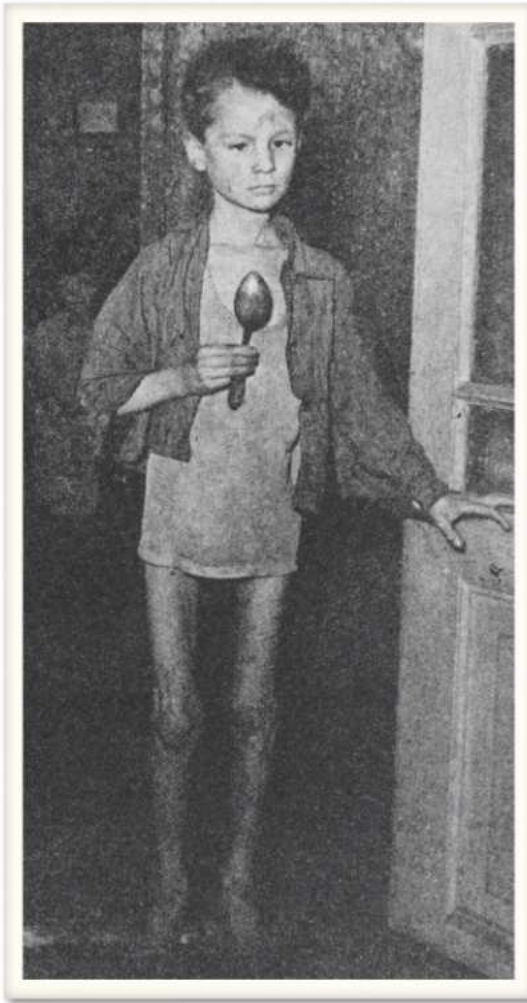
Dutch were deported and forced to work. Around 120,000 were taken after the railway strike.



Milk could be smuggled past the German-regulated rationing system in small containers.

With straps, the containers could be worn around the neck and hidden under clothing as the milk was carried into heavily guarded cities.

A spoon was a constant companion for malnourished children, who were prepared in case they were offered a mouthful of soup.



in Amsterdam and the similarly life-threatening diphtheria had appeared in Rotterdam.

The situation was now so bad that even hunger trips to the countryside for food were life-threatening. Margaret von Lenip lived in Heemstede on one of the busiest routes along which people searched for food:

"On the road that goes along our house, you could see a long trail of people, coming from The Hague or Rotterdam and walking to ... the north of the country where there are many big farms. But because everyone did it, the farmers could not give very much. Everyone was worn out; many died along the road. The farmers would not give anything for money and therefore the people gave their last shoes, their last coat, just for a little bit of food."

Soon most of the traffic disappeared. The hunger trips took too much effort compared to the meagre yield. In the cities, trading on the black market also died out because no one had anything to sell any more.

Piece of cheese hurt stomach

The desperate situation was becoming commonplace in the Netherlands. In Velp, near Arnhem, lived 15-year-old Audrey Kathleen Ruston. Her father was a

Briton of Austrian descent and her mother belonged to the Dutch nobility. Before the war, she and her family had lived in luxury. But during the occupation, they'd lost almost everything, and in early 1945, the heavily laden tables of the past were only a distant memory.

"I could sense it caused my mother great pain not to provide my brothers and me with the well-balanced and beautifully served meals she was used to, so I felt I could eliminate her problem by denying I missed the good things we used to eat. Of course, I took it to an extreme. I forced myself to eliminate the need for food. I closed my eyes to the fact that I was starving," the girl said.

Her half-brother Jan was the hungriest of the siblings. Audrey got annoyed when he held his stomach and moaned for food. He was deported to Germany to work as forced labour, while her other half-brother, Alex, went underground to avoid the same fate. As the last remaining child, Audrey tried to keep hunger at bay by creating her own reality.

"I decided to master food; I told myself I didn't need it," the girl later recounted.

Her dance teacher realised that the young girl was not looking after herself and decided to contribute what little he could, a red ball of Edam cheese.

"I've been hoarding this for an emergency, and this is an emergency if ever I've seen one," he said. Just a small piece of the cheese perked her up. She tried more, but it made her stomach hurt. The years of deprivation had changed how her body coped with food.

Audrey survived the hardships of war and went on to become a world-famous actress under the stage name Audrey Hepburn. In Hollywood, her slender figure attracted admiration.

The large number of children caught up in the starvation increased the pressure on the Allies. Gerbrandy bombarded Churchill and US President Roosevelt with letters demanding action and help for the occupied Netherlands. British General George Clark also joined in. He was responsible for the Netherlands within Allied High Command and no longer believed the famine could be managed after victory.

"I feel very strongly that far more active steps should be taken here and now to enter the occupied portion of the Netherlands in order to effect some measure of relief to this distressed people. By neglecting to do this, the Allies are running the risk of having at their doorstep a disaster of unparalleled magnitude. If we are really fighting for an ideal and fighting to liberate a people, surely it is time to take some very definitive action in the matter instead of tacitly allowing starvation and death to overcome some three million of our nearest neighbours," Clark appealed.

In London, Churchill began to falter under the pressure. Suddenly, a new invasion of the Netherlands was on the table, but it was too late. For months, the Allies had been secretly working on their major ►

Resistance movements flourished

As the Allies landed in Normandy, hope for liberation from German occupation grew in the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark and Norway. Thousands of citizens joined the resistance in the decisive phase of the war.

The first freedom fighters in the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark and Norway had a lot in common: they were relatively few in number, received little support from the population and the Germans quickly dismantled their organisations. It wasn't until 1943 that resistance began to make sense to the general public. German defeats on the Eastern Front and in North Africa showed that the fortunes of war were turning, and ordinary citizens decided to help freedom on its way.

Norway's most famous freedom fighter was Max Manus, who carried out bombing raids on ships in Oslo harbour. However, only a few conducted sabotage, and the resistance's main strategy was to run an underground army that forced the Germans to keep large numbers of troops in Norway. During the war, the German military organisation reached 400,000 men.

Denmark had both an underground army and active sabotage groups. They carried out a total

of 1,526 acts against the railways and 2,801 against companies producing goods for the Germans. Blowing up the railway network in Jutland was considered particularly helpful to the Allies. In June 1944, sabotage allegedly delayed trains carrying German troops from Norway to northern France, where the Allies had landed, but studies have since cast doubt on the military significance of sabotage. German work crews were often able to repair the rails so quickly that trains could keep to their schedules.

Resistance fighters paralysed grid

In Belgium, university students formed the small but extremely active sabotage organisation Groupe G. The force carried out its biggest mission in January 1944, when a series of bombings knocked out the country's entire high-voltage grid, and it took an extensive German effort to restore power. After D-Day, Groupe G and other organisations focused their efforts on

German trains travelling through Belgium to Normandy. Rails, bridges, tunnels, trains and carriages became targets for explosives.

Sabotage in the Netherlands really took off as Allied forces approached the southern border with Belgium in September 1944. During the fighting at Arnhem, German troops were delayed by trees the Dutch had cut down and placed across roads, and the resistance movement controlled the phone network for several days.

The biggest task in the Netherlands, however, was helping people for whom the Germans were looking. In 1944, Jews, downed Allied pilots and thousands of others needed shelter, food and sometimes a life-saving escape route out of the country. Jewish girl Anne Frank and her family hid for two years before being arrested and deported in August 1944. The following month, the railway strike drove 27,000 workers and their families underground, bringing the number of people in hiding to 300,000.

With petrol and matches, the resistance group BOPA hit strategic targets in Denmark.



offensive into the heart of Germany and in April 1945, an alternative plan took shape that went against the prime minister's previous principles of not allowing food transport to the starving civilians. In a letter to the US president, Churchill acknowledged the Netherlands' need:

"The plight of the civil population in occupied Holland is desperate. Between two and three million people are facing starvation. We believe that large numbers are dying daily, and the situation must deteriorate rapidly. I fear we may soon be in the presence of a tragedy," he wrote.

Churchill had always refused to negotiate with Hitler. Now he would make an exception and contact the Führer's envoy Seyss-Inquart through his agents. The hope was to reach an agreement that would allow Allied ships or planes to deliver relief supplies to the occupied Netherlands. Roosevelt agreed to the idea shortly before his death, and General Eisenhower also supported it, as long as he could avoid having to invade the Netherlands.

He said that he recognised that some of the relief aid would fall into German hands, but *"I accept this risk. Any assistance to the Dutch civil population that can be provided before the liberation will ease the relief problem subsequent to liberation."*

The sworn enemies of World War II were finally driven to the negotiating table for the first time.

Supplies fell from the sky

In the spring of 1945, Nazi Germany was under pressure from the west and east. Until recently, Hitler had ruled supreme, but as the Third Reich declined, his subordinates began going behind his back. This was particularly true of Reich Commissioner Arthur Seyss-Inquart in the Netherlands. He was a loyal Nazi but enough of a realist to comprehend the situation Germany was in. After discreet negotiations in April, he struck a deal. He would look the other way while planes dropped relief supplies

to the Dutch. In return, the Allies promised not to attack the Netherlands.

Pilot Robert Forsyth belonged to a British squadron that flew over the Dutch coast in late April. His unit marked the drop zones for the bombers, which were loaded to the brim with 11,000 tonnes of aid.

"It was an unnerving experience to be flying virtually over the rooftops of Rotterdam and seeing columns of German soldiers marching along the streets but we could also see delighted civilians waving from the roofs of their houses as we made our way to the dropping zone ... So much so that I personally made up my modest sweet ration which we got for each flight, making it into a kind of parachute using my handkerchief and a bit of string, and threw it out of the window in the hope that some child would be lucky that day," said Forsyth.

Down on the ground, Hans Muller rejoiced at the sight of the planes and the pilots' shower of gifts:

"Starting on 27th April, hundreds of huge Lancaster bombers approached at treetop level from the west and dropped food ... There were K-rations, flour, Welfare biscuits, powdered eggs, Irish stew; the crews dropped small parachutes with chewing gum and candy for the kids. It was something you will never forget, as long as those who were there will live. You KNEW the war was over at last, although there were still armed German soldiers in the streets."

The aid landed in zones that had been agreed between the Allies and Germans. But according to Muller, it wasn't enough to simply drop the supplies:

"As a matter of fact, most of that dropped food reached the population only weeks later since there was hardly any means of transportation left. But the psychological effect was tremendous, it kept us alive."

Since December, the Dutch death toll had been rising. Now all indications were that the nightmare would soon be over. And a week later, on 4th May, it was. Radio Oranje announced that the troops in the Netherlands would surrender the following day. Hans Muller watched Amsterdam explode in celebration:

"Then the streets filled with people, the national colours red, white, blue and with an orange pennant appeared everywhere. An old man died, his emotions had overtaxed his undernourished body, but he died with a smile on his face, it was over. And my father got the very, very last item from his secret store: a small tin with cocktail sausages. I still see the tin ... the small key attached to the lid, the cocktail sticks in a paper wrapping. There were two for each of us."

The feared death toll of two to three million civilians never materialised. However, 22,000 Dutch people starved to death during the Hunger Winter and the deprivation left a deep mark. Children conceived during the food shortages suffered from nutritional deficiencies in the womb and grew up to have obesity, diabetes and schizophrenia. For them, the war never ended. ■

AUDREY HEPBURN (1929-1993)

Actress Audrey Hepburn experienced the food shortages in the Netherlands when she was 15. She was 168 cm tall at liberation, but weighed just 40 kg. She had oedema and jaundice, caused by her blood and liver not working properly. The symptoms abated, but her kidneys were permanently damaged, so she didn't produce enough red blood cells.

She thus suffered from fatigue and shortness of breath all her life.



The rain of relief aid that was showered on the Netherlands in the two operations Manna and Chowhound was insufficient. From May 1945, help was also delivered in lorries.

By Else Christensen

Dutch had to be starved into submission

As Operation Market Garden got underway, Dutch railway workers threw everything they had into helping the Allies. The effects of the Hunger Winter, when the Germans tried to starve the Dutch population into submission as a consequence of the strikes, can still be seen.

The Germans treated the inhabitants of the occupied countries very differently. What was the relationship like between the Germans and the Dutch immediately after the occupation of the Netherlands in 1940?

In the months immediately after the occupation, relations between the German civilian government led by Arthur Seyss-Inquart, Reich commissioner for the occupied Netherlands, and the Dutch population were relatively good, considering the war.

This was due to the fact that the Reich commissioner had been instructed by Hitler to treat the Dutch well. He was also given orders to ensure that the Dutch food supply was not significantly worse than that of Germany. He also had to ensure that Dutch industry was incorporated into the German war economy. The idea was to win the

Dutch over to National Socialism. Once that happened, they would voluntarily and of their own accord change the structure of their society to fit in with National Socialist ideology, according to the Nazi top brass. As a result, the Dutch were given a relatively privileged position compared to other occupied peoples. Also, the German leadership in the Netherlands was relatively small and its main function was to supervise the Dutch government. Therefore, the day-to-day management of the Netherlands remained in the hands of Dutch officials.

The civil servants came from the former ministries, but from 1941 onwards they were increasingly replaced by pro-German officials. In this way, the positions were slowly Nazified.

Naturally, every aspect of everyday life was affected by the occupation, but for the general population, the first few months did not confirm the initial fears many had had.

In February 1941, the Nazis began deporting Dutch Jews. How did this change relations?

In the capital, Amsterdam, in February 1941, there were violent clashes between National Socialists and Jewish youths. The Germans responded by arresting and then deporting 425 young Jewish men. In response, workers from Amsterdam and surrounding cities went on a general strike on



DR INGRID DE ZWARTE (born 1988)

Hunger and the role of food in modern conflicts are at the centre of Ingrid de Zwart's research. In her PhD, she uncovered the consequences of 1944's Dutch Hunger Winter. Now, de Zwart is an assistant professor at the Department of Rural and Environmental History at Wageningen University in the Netherlands.



At the beginning of the war, the Germans were on a charm offensive and distributed cigarettes to Dutch soldiers during the invasion.

25th and 26th February. The strike was the most extensive in German-occupied territory to be prompted by the persecution of Jews. The February strike was an extremely important event in the German occupation. It marked a break between the initial stage of mutual adaptation to the occupation and the following period in which the Dutch were treated differently and harshly.

However, when the general deportations began in 1942 and large numbers of Jews were systematically sent to concentration camps in the east, there were no major strikes. Around 140,000 Jews lived in the Netherlands before the war. Around 102,000 perished in the concentration camps. A small proportion of Dutch Jews – around 16,000 – survived by going underground.

And then, in September 1944, Dutch railway workers went on strike. What was behind that?

The strike was a turning point in the war and led directly to the Hunger Winter – the famine that hit the Netherlands in the winter of 1944-45. The idea

of the railway strike was to support the Allied war effort and hamper the Germans' fighting ability by preventing them from transporting men and materiel to the front. The strike began on the same day that the Allies launched Operation Market Garden, which aimed to encircle the heart of German industry and liberate the Netherlands. It came about at the instigation of the Allied commander-in-chief, Dwight D Eisenhower. The idea was for the strike to precede Operation Market Garden, but due to a misunderstanding, it was not announced until the evening of the assault, but was successful nonetheless, and the following day almost all of the Netherlands' 30,000 railway workers walked out and went underground. As a result, no trains ran in the occupied territories until the spring of 1945.

In response to the strike, Germany cut off food supplies to the Netherlands. Why?

The Germans were keen to end the railway workers' strike quickly, so the embargo was ►

intended as equal parts retaliation and pressure. Specifically, the German embargo was implemented ten days after the start of Operation Market Garden on 27th September 1944 at the behest of German Reich Commissioner Seyss-Inquart. The idea was to cut off the transport of food from the agricultural areas in the north-eastern part of the Netherlands to the western parts. These were the largest cities in the Netherlands, where 2.6 million people – a large proportion of the country's population – lived. The Germans also placed an embargo on shipping, and other equipment necessary for transport was seized.

The Germans cut off communication, too, for example by cutting telephone and telegraph lines. They also carried out explosions in the harbours of Rotterdam and Amsterdam, sinking ships while they were in port. The wrecks were left blocking the entrance to the harbours. German military authorities quickly realised that widespread hunger in the cities would lead to riots, chaos and disease. The military wanted to avoid this. Soldiers needed to be able to concentrate on fighting the Allies without having to deal with havoc in the

hinterland. Under pressure from the German military leadership, Seyss-Inquart lifted the embargo, partially after three months, then fully in November 1944. But by then, the food situation was already critical, although the lack of supplies had not yet developed into a full-blown famine.

With the sanctions being eased fairly quickly, what caused the disaster to become so bad?

The famine hit the western part of the country, where large cities such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague are located. These cities and their immediate surroundings didn't have enough supplies to feed the 2.6 million people living there. Getting food from the north-east to the west was now extremely difficult and the cities ran out of food very quickly.

There was also a severe shortage of coal, due to the fact that the Allies had liberated the southern part of the Netherlands, where the country's coal deposits were located, cutting them off from the rest of the country. The lack of coal meant people couldn't cook or heat their homes when winter hit. Weather conditions also played a part. A period of

Half a litre of soup was given to Dutch children as emergency rations in The Hague if they turned up at a soup kitchen.



Had the surrender come later, the situation would have been much worse. ■ Ingrid de Zwart.

severe frost lasted from 31st December until the end of January 1945. The frost was so bad that all the waterways froze over and the already starving Dutch had to fight against extreme cold. The Allies, Germans and the Dutch government negotiated the possibility of sending food aid, but all parties had military considerations. As part of their economic warfare, the Allies refused to send food to enemy territory until the area was liberated. Otherwise, the supplies would benefit the Germans and enable them to hold out.

How bad was it?

Nowadays, we believe that a normal healthy diet for an adult not engaged in hard physical work should contain between 2,000 and 2,400 calories per day. At the end of November 1944, the energy content of the rations in the western Netherlands was below 750 calories. In January, during the period of the worst frost, the ration was less than 500 calories per person per day, less than a quarter of what is now considered healthy.

The majority of the rations consisted of carbohydrates, typically potatoes, bread and some vegetables. Potatoes were later replaced by sugar beet and in some parts of the country people ate tulip bulbs. This shows how bad things were. Fat and protein were almost non-existent in the diet.

The absolute low point came just before Germany's surrender, in May 1945. At this point, the daily rations only provided the starving with 360 calories, and there was absolutely no food left in the western Netherlands when the Germans finally surrendered. Had the surrender come later, the situation would have been much worse. Around 20,000 people died as a result of the famine. Many more were affected health-wise, not only during the war, but also afterwards.

How and when did the famine end?

The famine ended when the Netherlands was liberated on 5th May 1945. During Operation Manna, US and British planes dropped supplies over the western Netherlands from 28th April to 10th May. The operation was a highly visible and symbolic end to the war and famine.

It took time for the food to reach the Dutch. The problems were not solved immediately after the war, partly because much of the infrastructure, such as roads, ports and bridges, had been destroyed in the final months of the war. By the end of May 1945, the rations only provided 1,000



British biscuits rained down on the Netherlands during a series of air-drop operations to prevent famine in 1945.

calories per person per day. It is also important to note that it took a long time for the population to regain their health. Doctors reported the last official death from starvation as late as July 1945.

What were the long-term consequences?

Mortality and morbidity rates were back to pre-war levels by late summer 1945. But the long-term effects can still be seen in people born during or just after the famine. The Dutch Hunger Winter is recognised internationally as one of the most important case studies for researchers studying the long-term effects of famine on children. It is a special case for researchers because it took place in a country where people previously had enough food and because we know where and when the famine occurred.

The most striking conclusions are that people born or conceived during the famine had an increased risk of obesity, type 2 diabetes and schizophrenia, as well as an increased risk of developing cardiopulmonary disease, depression and certain types of cancer. The studies are still ongoing, and researchers are investigating whether the effects are inherited by the next generation – whether people pass them on to their children. The studies are crucial to understanding the consequences of today's health crises, and results from the Dutch famine research are being used to study the famine during the Chinese Great Leap Forward, for example, and in Ukraine in the 1930s.

The study of the Dutch famine can also be used to understand what happens today during famines, what we can expect to happen to the population afterwards, and not least what we can expect to happen to the children who are not yet born, but whose parents are starving. ■

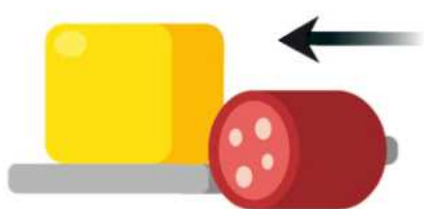
How the Germans suppressed occupied territories

RAW MATERIALS were stolen

Everyone in the German-occupied countries were little more than commodities. Some had to supply agricultural goods, while others sent clothes, weapons, coal, money and even gold to their new masters in Nazi Germany.

The Germans viewed their occupied countries as a huge bonanza that could both raise the standard of living for civilians in war-weary Germany and help keep the war machine running. In 1941 alone, very early in the war, the Germans collected more than \$12 billion from their occupied territories as a kind of protection payment for their troops stationed in each country.

Over time, all Dutch and Polish industry came under direct German control, and citizens were conscripted into forced labour in what were now German factories. Czechoslovakia paid with gold and iron from its mines, while its important machine and textile industries supplied uniforms, clothing for German civilians, and weapons and machinery for the army and factories of the Third Reich. The country also sent 80 percent of its grain to Germany. Belgium's gold reserves were confiscated, and all its 1,500 locomotives and 75,000 lorries were taken. In Yugoslavia, all cars and bicycles were seized. In Norway, German demands included wool blankets, ski trousers and windproof jackets.



Food

Butter, milk and meat were shipped from countries such as Denmark and Belgium, while grain came from Eastern European areas such as Greece.



Textiles

The Czechs, French and Dutch supplied clothing to the German army, while Norway supplied wool and blankets to German civilians affected by bombing.



Fuel and raw materials

Mines in Czechoslovakia and France's steel and coal mines were vital to the Germans, who seized everything they could lay their hands on.



Basic foodstuffs

Sugar beet, rye and wheat flooded in from Poland and elsewhere. German plundering led to famine in countries such as Greece, where thousands died.



Money and gold

Any occupied countries that didn't transport their gold reserves to safety had to hand them over to Germany. Billions in cash were also extorted.

CENSORSHIP

was everywhere

The occupying power had eyes everywhere and monitored local press, teachers and private individuals zealously and harshly to ensure that opposition to the regime did not grow too large.

Radio and newsreels

Items subject to censorship included news coming in from foreign press agencies as well as weekly newsreel content in the cinemas.



Education

Teachers risked imprisonment or being put to death if they spoke ill of Nazi Germany in particular or the war in general.



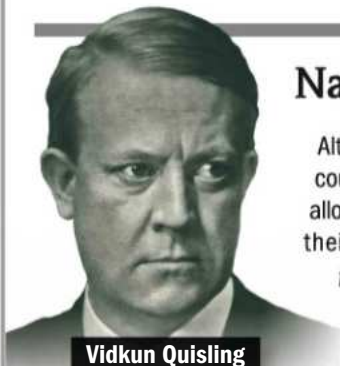
Newspapers

The German occupiers controlled what subjects local newspapers were permitted to write about.



Letters

Private letters were subject to random checks, but not everything was intercepted and read. Punishment for anti-German propaganda was severe.



Vidkun Quisling

Nazi-friendly parties gained power

Although some countries, were allowed to retain their elected governments after the German

occupation, it was more usual for domestic far-right parties or German-installed Reichskommissars to take power in the occupied countries of Europe.

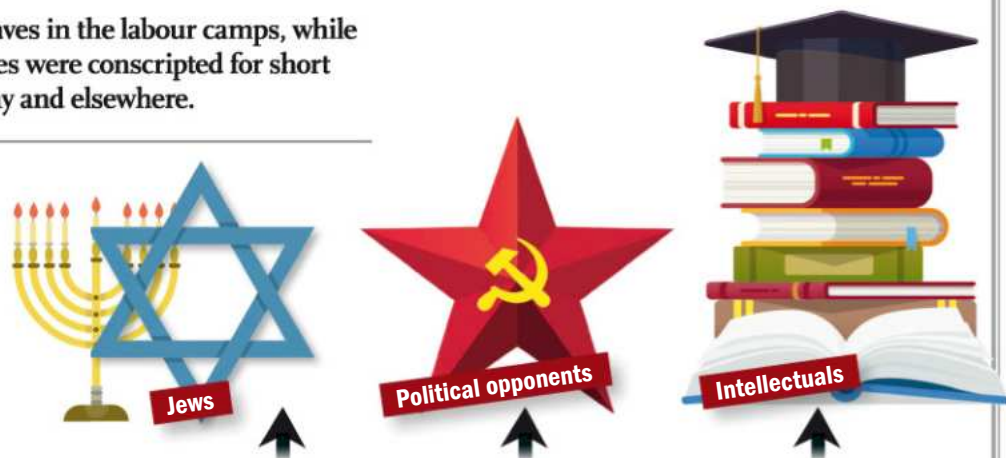
In Norway, Vidkun Quisling was given the role of prime minister, his fascist *Nasjonal Samling* (National Gathering) the country's only legal

party. Similarly, Southern France, known as Vichy France, was led by the fascist Marshal Phillippe Petáin. The Netherlands, Belgium and the rest of France became so-called Reichskommissariats, where the Nazis appointed German governors to rule the area, while Luxembourg was annexed by Germany.

CIVILIANS

were put to work

Political opponents were used as slaves in the labour camps, while civilians from the occupied countries were conscripted for short periods of forced labour in Germany and elsewhere.



Forced labour

In Eastern Europe in particular, the local population was treated brutally by the occupiers. Jews, political opponents and intellectuals ended up in labour camps where they starved to death. But millions of civilians were also forced to work in the war industry or used as labourers on military construction projects in their home countries. Millions more, especially Poles, were deported to Germany and used as forced labourers in the German war industry or agriculture, which was hungry for labour. Dutch, Belgian and French labourers were also sent to Germany under duress and put to work in war production. However, their conditions were better and the 'posting' lasted for a shorter period – usually around six months.

Business owners

Voluntary cooperation

Although Danish manufacturers, for example, worked with the Wehrmacht and were paid well for their deliveries of vehicles, business deals were not always voluntary. German pressure was enormous, and business owners risked having their businesses shut down or harassed if they did not do business with the Nazi regime.



THUGS

terrorised the streets

It wasn't only German soldiers and the Gestapo that civilians feared. Local gangs of young men also created fear and terror, blowing up buildings and murdering critics of the Nazi regime in cold blood without warning.



Schalburgtage (counter-sabotage)

Young Nazi gangs in Denmark took revenge for sabotage against the Germans by blowing up innocent civilian buildings under the cover of night without prior warning.



Local murder squads

The thugs also tracked down civilians who they felt were criticising the occupation regime. Victims were usually gunned down in the street without warning.

Organised mass murder

In retribution for the killing of Nazis, the SS and Gestapo murdered entire villages. The mass murders were designed to dissuade local resistance from taking further action.



The Gestapo retaliated ten-fold

Towards the end of the war, innocent civilians paid dearly for resisting. Often, the SS murdered ten civilians for the death of every Nazi – a number that in some places eventually grew to 100. The worst hit by the SS was the town of Lidice in Czechoslovakia, where 173

men over the age of 15 were murdered after the assassination of SS leader Reinhard Heydrich, and later the French town of Oradour-sur-Glane, where 673 men, women and children were burned to death in revenge for the kidnapping of a single SS officer.

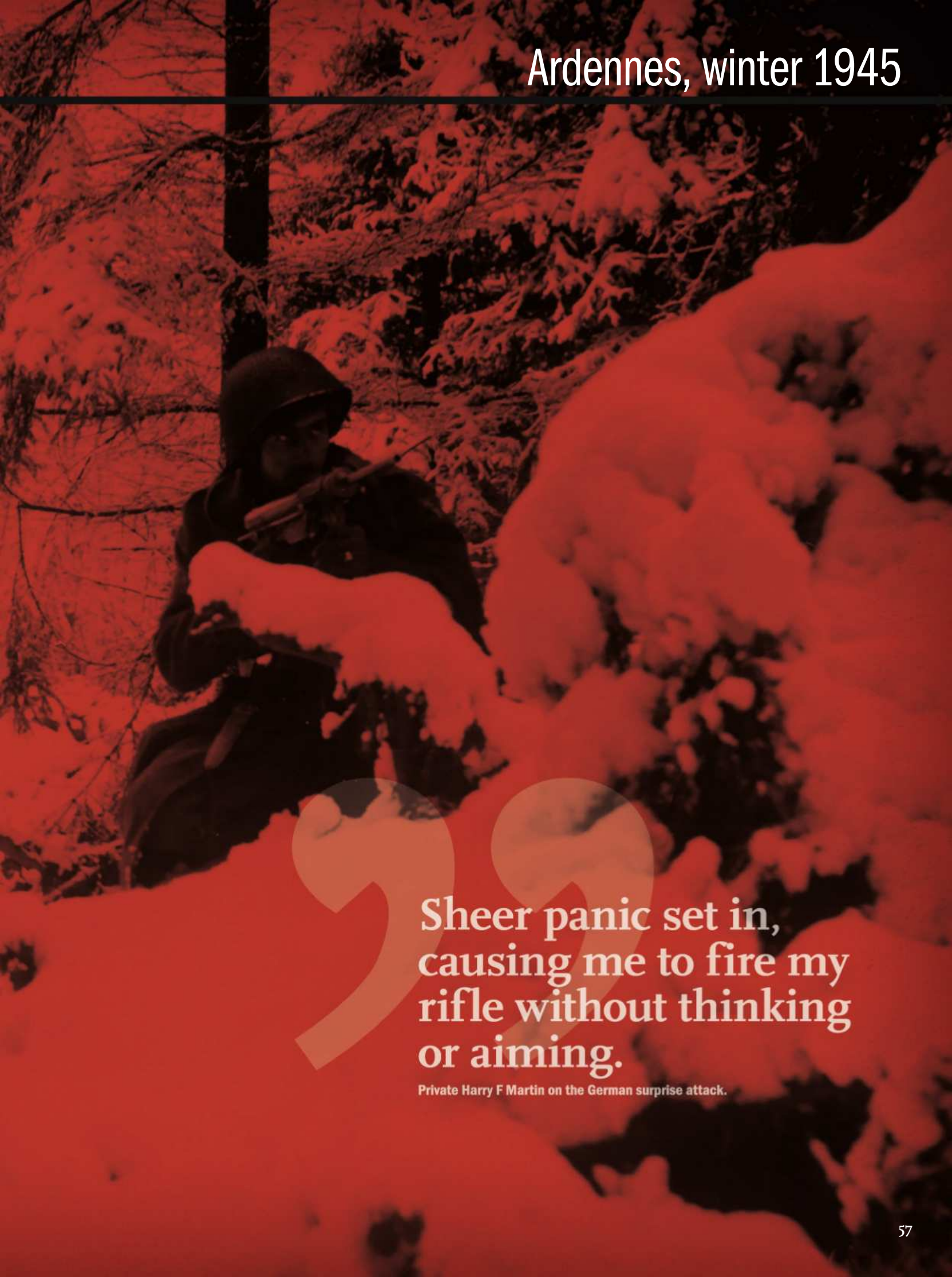
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HITLER'S LAST HOPE

The Allied soldiers defending the Ardennes Forest lacked winter camouflage and adequate equipment.

Ardennes, winter 1945



Sheer panic set in,
causing me to fire my
rifle without thinking
or aiming.

Private Harry F Martin on the German surprise attack.

Hitler's last hope

Allied troops finally reached the borders of Nazi Germany in late 1944. Soldiers and generals alike anticipated a quick death blow, which would allow them to finally return home. But Hitler had other plans. He wanted to teach his enemies a lesson using the same blitzkrieg strategy that had overwhelmed France in 1940.

By Esben Mønster-Kjær

Engine noises could be heard roaring from the German lines in Belgium for several days leading up to 16th December 1944. But the soldiers of the US Army's 106th Infantry Division, newly arrived at the front, had no idea if the commotion should be a cause for concern. They had no combat experience – many had only a half-completed training programme from back home behind them. Veterans shook their heads when they saw the young rookies arrive, awkwardly carrying their equipment. The raw recruits would now have to defend a front that was three times longer than the recommended eight kilometres for a full division. What's more, the front line cut right here through the densely forested hills of the Ardennes.

The German noises didn't disturb the sleep of the more experienced neighbouring units. The enemy was probably just replacing their own troops in the front line. The division just relieved by the 106th had taken all the heaters with them, so the new arrivals mostly just wanted to stay indoors and try to keep warm.

A Christmas lull had descended both there and in Allied headquarters. Only when winter ended would the Allies deliver their coup de grace and invade Germany, a decision made by Commander-in-Chief Dwight D Eisenhower with the full agreement of his commanders Omar Bradley and Bernard Montgomery. Montgomery even planned to celebrate Christmas back home in Britain, while his US comrades also looked forward to a period of calm after continuous fighting since the invasion of Normandy on 6th June.

But on the morning of 16th December, the freshly hatched soldiers of the 106th Division woke up to an enemy other than the cold. Hordes of hardened German soldiers from the Eastern Front were pouring across the front line and into Belgium. Hitler had launched a colossal offensive that would cut the Allied forces in half with impressive strength to recapture the ground previously ceded by the German army. The plan was as insane as it was audacious, which is why Hitler caught the enemy completely unawares.

Hitler would turn defeat into victory

No Allied general took the threat of a potential German offensive seriously. According to an intelligence report on 12th December, the Germans were as good as broken: *"It is now certain that attrition is steadily sapping the strength of German*

forces on the Western Front and that the crust of defence is thinner, more brittle and more vulnerable than it appears on our G-2 maps or to the troops in the line," it read.

That same day, buses arrived at *Adlerhorst* (Eagle's Nest), the Führer's headquarters for the fighting in the west. Out stepped German generals who'd been divested of their weapons and disoriented by being driven around in circles for several hours. The increasingly distrustful and weakened Adolf Hitler had summoned the officers to tell them of his plans.

"The war is, of course, a test of endurance of all participants. The longer the war lasts, the more difficult will this test of endurance be. This endurance test will have to be suffered as long as there is some hope of success," Hitler said during a three-hour speech.

The words could be applied to the German people, and even Hitler himself, whose pale face, sagging shoulders and shaking arm shocked his audience. The war years had taken their toll, but the speech was really about the Allies, their different aims, and their will to fight, which, according to the Führer, was running out.

Hitler intended to bring down the enemy alliance with his *Wacht am Rhein* (Watch on the Rhine) operation four days later. German panzer divisions would recapture the traffic hubs in the towns of St Vith and Bastogne as well as on the River Meuse. Their final objective was the port city of Antwerp, through which the majority of Allied supplies flowed. The loss would cause the US and Britain to lose heart, Hitler predicted. The blitzkrieg attack would be launched along the same route that in 1940 paved the way into France – through the deep Ardennes forests. Defying all military logic, the Führer would utilise the winter cold in conjunction with the area's foggy conditions to allow his most fanatical soldiers to regain lost ground in record time.

Teenagers started the battle

Thirty German divisions were deployed before dawn on 16th December as the Battle of the Bulge began. For years, Hitler's armies had been outnumbered on every battlefield, but not this time. They advanced with far more soldiers, guns and tanks than the scattered US forces facing them.

Among the troops – particularly the panzer units – there was an excitement not felt in years. Now they were advancing and rolling forward just like in the

STRENGTH RATIO

When the Battle of the Bulge began,

228,741

troops stood on the US side. On the German side of the front, around

406,342

soldiers were sent into battle in the harsh winter cold.

good old days, when blitzkrieg laid all of Western Europe at the feet of Nazi Germany. Corporal Friedrich Bertenrath savoured the moment.

"We had begun to act like a beaten army. Now, moving forward, the men were extremely happy and filled with enthusiasm. Everywhere there were signs of renewed hope," the corporal recounted in his front-line accounts.

The exact opposite scenario played out among the Allies, who either knew nothing but victory or didn't know anything about fighting at all.

"The morning of 16th December, one of our leaders came charging into our cabin just before dawn, screaming, 'The Germans are coming! The Germans are coming! We'll all be killed!'"

"Thoughts raced through my head: This had been a quiet sector for almost three months. We had only been here for five days, so why are the Germans attacking us? We grabbed our rifles and steel helmets without wasting a second," recalled Private Harry F Martin, who'd never fired a shot in combat.

Soon, hundreds of shadows appeared in the semi-darkness in front of Martin's foxhole.

"Sheer panic set in, causing me to fire my rifle without thinking or aiming. I was unaware of my▶

WHAT IF...

...the US had easily won in the Hürtgen Forest?

Shortly before Hitler's Battle of the Bulge, American forces attacked further north in the Hürtgen Forest. US generals would rue the loss of those troops sacrificed in the battle.

In September 1944, US troops broke through the Siegfried Line defences on Germany's western border. The breakthrough marked the start of the longest single battle in US history, and the bloody battles in the Hürtgen Forest characterised the outcome of the decisive phase of the war.

The advance intended to threaten Germany's industrial heartland along with a dam in the Ruhr. In doing so, Allied generals hoped to force the Germans into moving forces away from the front to protect war production.

But the fighting became deadlocked and up to 55,000 US troops were killed,

wounded or captured trying to drive out their opponents. The high casualties weakened many divisions, which had to be transferred to more peaceful sections of the front. Many moved to the Ardennes, where the generals believed the risk of German attacks to be lowest.

The stubborn German defence gave Hitler an opportunity for a counter-offensive. After the battle for the Hürtgen Forest, the Germans could use the area to build up their forces ahead of the Battle of the Bulge in December. If Hürtgen had not been in German hands, Hitler would hardly have been able to muster the same strength.

The Siegfried Line didn't fall until 1945, despite Allied breakthroughs in the Hürtgen Forest in September 1944.



body, just terror, firing my rifle as fast as my finger could pull the trigger. But they still kept coming as though they were immune to death. Apparently I was not hitting a thing. I was so transfixed with fear and terror, my eyes did not focus on the individual enemy attacking."

Martin watched as the bunker containing his unit's command post was obliterated by German hand grenades. He managed to regain control of his nerves, took careful aim and sent a shot through the head of an enemy. But in the trees around his position, thousands of Germans surged forward and the 106th Division's death struggle began in earnest.

Meanwhile, German panzer divisions spent most of the first day of the battle waiting for infantry and artillery to punch a hole in the front. Only when a clear path was made to the enemy's rear could the tanks roll.

The breakthrough was a long time coming because the war had left its mark on German infantry divisions. Many of their soldiers were either teenagers or ethnic Germans forcibly recruited from places like Alsace, Poland and Romania. They had almost no training and only a small hard core of officers and sergeants to keep them together. Their skills did not extend beyond clumsy frontal assaults, and in many places, coordination with German guns failed completely. German flying instructor Major Frank

experienced this when 700 soldiers aged 16-17 were stopped by murderous fire from a US bunker.

"What a show for young boys, making their way over flat ground and without any support from heavy weapons! I decided to wait for a forward observation officer. The regimental commander said: 'Get going. Take that village – there are only a few soldiers holding it.' 'That's madness,' I said to the Regimentskommandeur. 'No, no, it's an order. Get going, we must capture the village before nightfall.' I said: 'We will too. The hour we lose waiting for the forward observation officer I will make up two or three times over afterwards,'" the major recounted.

The teenagers took the village, but only with heavy losses and without any artillery support. One hundred and eighty-one Americans were taken prisoner, but the inexperienced US troops in the front line had held out longer than the Germans expected. Nevertheless, as darkness fell on the first day of the battle, the Germans had created cracks in the defences, allowing the panzer troops to move. The blitzkrieg was on.

US forces fled under cover of night

As the German panzer units seeped through the front line, the Americans now risked being surrounded. Many had no idea of the peril they were in, and the troops bedded down after a hard day. Among ►

The Ardennes Forest was a nightmare after German paratroopers landed behind the Allied front line. Scouts had to keep a constant lookout.





Hitler defended desperate push

With Nazi Germany under pressure from all fronts, Hitler insisted that attack was the best form of defence. The visibly weakened Führer galvanised his generals with a marathon speech in the top-secret bunker complex at Adlerhorst – the German headquarters on the Western Front.

Hitler's commanders
dared not contradict
their unrealistic and
paranoid Führer.

OFFENSIVE: The purpose of the German Operation Wacht am Rhein was to convince the Allies that they would never defeat the German people.

As soon as hope of a victory disappears, the test of endurance will not be accepted with the same willpower with which, for instance, a fortress fights as long as it still has hope for relief. It is, therefore, important to remove the enemy's confidence in victory ... by making clear to him from the beginning, through offensive actions, that the success of his plans is impossible.

This will never be as possible through a successful defensive as through a successful offensive operation. In the process of time we can, therefore, not hold on to the basic principle that a defensive action is the strongest component of a battle. It can favour the enemy.

[O]verlong periods of exclusively defensive endurance will drag us down in the long run, and they will have to be relieved by successful counter-blows. It was, therefore, my desire to make this war an offensive one, an active one, from the beginning, and not to let myself manoeuvre into a world war situation. If that happens anyway, then it is simply the result of the falling away of our allies which, of course, has operational consequences.

WAR OF AGGRESSION: After the German defeat in World War I, Hitler had learnt his lesson and knew that trench warfare couldn't be won. But should it happen, he had prepared Nazi Germany to barricade itself.



BLIND FAITH IN VICTORY:
Through indoctrination and propaganda, Hitler had fostered a people who blindly believed in victory and Germany's greatness. Even in the final stages of the war, German troops fought fanatically.

If one is himself forced to the defensive then it becomes his vital mission to make it clear to the enemy by ruthless strikes that he has, nevertheless, gained nothing, and that the war will be indeterminately carried on.

It is just as important to enforce these psychological moments by not letting a moment go to waste, to make it clear to the enemy that whatever he does he will never be able to count on a capitulation, never, never, never!

This is decisive. Even the smallest sign of defeatism raises the enemy's hopes for victory; his broad masses ... will be filled with new hope and will gladly take upon themselves all sacrifices and all deprivations.

One should never forget that the total amount of men employed on our side is still as large as that of our opponents. We should never forget that a part of the enemy is tied down in East Asia against Japan, against a state which, even without China, has over a hundred million people and which represents a valuable factor in technical armament.

AXIS: Hitler still believed that his Far Eastern allies would be able to turn the tide of war, even as the other Axis powers fell away one by one.

1944

Every German general shakes his head at Hitler's planned offensive in the Ardennes. According to his plan, all odds fall in the Führer's favour, while the Allies' luck fails.

20/7

In July, Hitler is the victim of an assassination attempt that leaves him paranoid. Increased security and secrecy mean that Allied spies don't realise what Hitler is planning.



A German ambush catches a string of fleeing US vehicles near the town of Poteau. The German soldiers take everything they can carry from the vehicles.

15/9

In September, Hitler decides that the attack should go through the Ardennes, as in 1940, where the Allies are weakest.

4/12

When US General Omar Bradley is told that the Germans may be preparing an attack, his response is: "Let them come."

16/12

The key to the German advance is fog, which incapacitates British aircraft. Seven days of dense fog hit in December.



the exhausted soldiers was Sergeant Dick Byers, who was awoken in the night by hushed warnings that German tanks were on their way.

"We headed for the back door of the barn, thinking to use our radio in the jeep to call for artillery fire ... where the tanks were slowing down. As we opened the back door of the barn, we saw three German paratroopers coming up the driveway. We could see them ... but they couldn't see us with the black courtyard behind us. Since they appeared to be armed with Schmeissers and had the backing and support of an entire panzer battle group, we decided not to argue for possession of the radio," he recalled.

As silently as possible, the Americans slipped away into the forest, where the trees and darkness hid them.

"Lieutenant Mayer had an SCR-536 handie-talkie which was picking up the Germans broadcasting in too-perfect English, 'Come in, come in, come in. Danger, danger, danger. We are launching a strong attack. Come in, come in, anyone on this channel?' No one responded, knowing they were using a captured radio in an attempt to locate us in the dark ... Over the roar and smell of the tank engines, we could hear the shouts of the paratroopers as they guided the tank commanders around the bend."

Sergeant Byers and the soldiers around him escaped, but the Germans surrounded two of the 106th Division's three regiments. Private Kurt Vonnegut later recounted their fate in a letter to his family:

"I've been a prisoner of war since December 19th, 1944, when our division was cut to ribbons by Hitler's last desperate thrust through Luxembourg and Belgium. Seven fanatical panzer divisions hit us and cut us off from the rest of Hodges' First Army. The other American divisions on our flanks managed to pull out: We were obliged to stay and fight. Bayonets aren't much good against tanks: Our ammunition, food and medical supplies gave out and our casualties outnumbered those who could still fight so we ►



During the escape, US troops buried M1 mines with 2.7 kg of TNT in the ground behind them.

A spider wheel was placed on top of the mine, which detonated when the wheel was pressed upon – by a vehicle, for example.



SS officer Otto Skorzeny was famous for helping Mussolini escape house arrest. In 1944, he spread chaos behind enemy lines.

gave up. The 106th got a Presidential Citation and some British decoration from Montgomery for it, I'm told, but I'll be damned if it was worth it."

After just a few days at the front and one major firefight, 8,000 men had already been taken as prisoners of war.

Eisenhower held few cards in his hand

As the US front collapsed in the Ardennes, champagne flowed in the Palace of Versailles near Paris, barely 500 kilometres away. This was General Eisenhower's headquarters, and he was joined by his loyal subordinate Bradley, who had arrived to receive a promotion. The celebration was in full swing when a staff officer rushed in to report the attack in Belgium. The scale of the operation was unknown, but Eisenhower immediately had a good guess:

"We had always been convinced that before the Germans acknowledged final defeat in the West they would attempt one desperate counter-offensive."

According to the two generals, Hitler had given them an opportunity for a major victory. Such a large-scale operation would drain the resources of the Germans' last major defence, the Siegfried Line, which the Allies could now more easily cross – if the German attack was repulsed, that is. But Eisenhower realised that his forces weren't in any position to seize the opportunity.

"In two important points the enemy had gained definite surprise. The first of these was in timing. In view of the terrible defeats we had inflicted upon him ... and of the extraordinary measures he had been compelled to undertake in raising new forces, we had believed that he could not be ready for a major assault as early as he was. The other point in which he surprised us was the strength of the attack," Eisenhower admitted.

The general was desperately short of soldiers. The only reserves he could send at short notice to the thinly

manned front line in the Ardennes were two exhausted parachute divisions. Back in September, they'd participated in the failed offensive at Arnhem, and they lacked much-needed rest, equipment and manpower to replace their losses. But the war couldn't wait.

Paratroopers landed in the forests

On the German side, paratroopers were also going into battle. For the first time since 1941, German troops would once again drop behind enemy lines. Back then, the capture of Crete had proved so costly that Hitler had prohibited major airborne operations as a result. Now he broke his rule when 1,200 men boarded transport planes on the night of 17th December as part of Operation *Stösser* (Hawk). Before dawn, the soldiers had to occupy a strategically important crossroads and clear the way for the tanks travelling overland.

Oberstleutnant Friedrich August Freiherr von der Heydte was given the difficult task of leading the operation. He'd gained fame on both sides of the front for his fighting spirit during the battles in Normandy. Now the lieutenant colonel had to make do with far less experienced soldiers. Shortly before take-off, he received further bad news: the wind was blowing at 17 metres per second. Normally, drops took place at six metres per second, but it was too late to hold off; 68 planes took off with their human cargo, belting out the paratroopers' battle song *Red Shines the Sun*. One of the men on board was Sergeant Willy Volberg.

"The pilots were assisted by the beams of searchlights towering into the nightly sky to direct the pilots to the drop zone. The crew members were generally inexperienced and, to a great extent, performed the task for the first time. To avoid collision, they used navigation lights and by this ... made easy targets for the US anti-aircraft artillery," the sergeant later recalled.

Pilots attempted evasive manoeuvres, scattering the formations. Some planes didn't make it to the landing zones until the scout planes' flares had burned out, at which point the pilots either brought their passengers back or let them jump blind.

After landing, Volberg and 15 other paratroopers wandered around in the dark, confused. At dawn, they realised they were six kilometres from the landing zone.

"Just before noon, we contact a German reconnaissance patrol – at first thinking it an enemy element – scouting towards Verviers. Advised by this patrol, we soon meet our unit at the crossing. But what is up here? Meanwhile, about 130 paratroopers (including ourselves) have met here, and even after the arrival of another 150 men, we form only a small part of the original task force," he recalled.

With fewer than 300 men, Heydte's mission was doomed. Instead, he hid his force in the woods, but ►

SS soldiers mowed down prisoners of war

On the second day of the Battle of the Bulge, an American unit was surprised and captured near the village of Malmédy. The Germans had orders to act ruthlessly. The ensuing massacre left 84 bodies in the snow.

Tanks from the 1st SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler surprised a US unit near Malmédy in the province of Liège. At lunchtime on 17th December 1944, the US troops surrendered and the prisoners were left in a snow-covered field with a handful of guards.

Suddenly, the Germans opened fire on the defenceless PoWs with machine guns. According to one account, the shooting started when the guards saw Americans trying to sneak away. Others claimed that the

Germans fired without warning. Prior to the advance, the soldiers had been ordered to show the same brutality they'd exhibited on the Eastern Front. The tactics were designed to get the Germans to Antwerp quickly, but also meant that they weren't permitted to take prisoners or show mercy to Belgian civilians.

The SS division committed several war crimes on the same day, but the Malmédy massacre was the worst. Word of the shooting spread within hours after survivors reached other US

units. American troops took their anger out on German prisoners for the rest of the Battle of the Bulge. The largest retaliation struck during the Chernogen Massacre on 1st January 1945, when 80 German PoWs were killed.

The details of the Malmédy massacre only became known when Allied troops captured the site on 14th January 1945 and discovered 84 frozen corpses. Machine-gun fire had killed most of them, while others had been shot in the head at point-blank range.



A red trail of atrocities followed on the heels of the German advance. Even civilians were executed without mercy.

I heard a single pistol shot and Romaker spluttered, 'My God! They shot Pappel in the head.' ■ Sergeant Grant Yager on German brutality.

they only had enough supplies for a single day, and soon the depleted force was being hunted by US troops.

Blitzkrieg left a trail of dead

As Operation Stösser was falling apart, German tanks, guns and infantry in lorries stormed along the poor roads of the Ardennes. At the front was SS-Obersturmbannführer Joachim Peiper, who constantly demanded faster speeds:

"I was not to bother about my flanks but was to drive rapidly to the Meuse River, making full use of the element of surprise."

Peiper's aim was to capture a bridge over the Meuse within four days before the Americans could blow them all up. The river lay roughly halfway along Hitler's designated route to Antwerp. But on the second day, Kampfgruppe Peiper was almost 24 hours behind schedule. He ploughed ahead, even as the frantic pace cost him valuable vehicles and men.

Peiper's route took him through US depots, which were crucial to the entire mission. Nazi Germany no longer possessed enough fuel for large-scale armoured operations, so his success depended on capturing US supplies en route. One depot was in Büllingen, where a few Americans put up resistance. Sergeant Grant Yager was one of them, armed with a bazooka and two aides.

"In just a minute or two, a second tank came over the hill, by which time I'd decided I could fire

the weapon without sights just by aiming alongside the barrel. When it was directly in front of us, at about 100 feet, I fired the bazooka. The round hit somewhere on the side and the tank turned part way around in the road. As the crewmen left the disabled tank, I fired my carbine hitting the first two but as I went to shoot a third, my carbine failed," Yager recounted.

Moments later, SS soldiers swarmed around them and Yager was forced to surrender with his two men. They'd just managed to bandage another comrade, Pappel, before the Germans forced them on to a vehicle to act as a human shield on their way into Büllingen.

"They made the three of us sit on the hood of the German halftrack ... I heard a single pistol shot and Romaker spluttered, 'My God! They shot Pappel in the head.'"

Peiper captured the depot along with fuel for his battle group to continue. As it advanced, the unit left a trail of war crimes in its wake.

Troops marched into the lion's den

As evening darkness dampened the fighting in the Ardennes on 17th December, US trucks poured into the 101st Airborne Division's camp in France.

Around 24 hours later, the exhausted paratroopers were dropped off outside the town of Bastogne. Here, seven roads converged through the southern

FACTS

The most powerful tank in the advance, the Tiger II, guzzled 4.75 litres of petrol for every

1,000

metres it travelled. The Germans only possessed enough fuel for half the journey to Antwerp.

ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUN

88-mm Flak 37

Gun was given new targets

Nazi Germany's feared 88-mm gun was built with bombers in mind. During the war, it proved to be an excellent tank killer, too.

In the 1930s, Europe's generals and statesmen feared that aeroplanes would carpet bomb their countries into submission in a future war. Germany's countermeasure was anti-aircraft guns, such as the long-range and accurate 88-mm Flak 37, which could fire shells eight kilometres into the air.

To combat tanks, the army developed lighter and more mobile guns. However, when the Germans encountered the heaviest French and British tanks in 1940, they proved ineffective. The 88-mm Flak 37's heavy shells, on the other hand, could penetrate even the thickest frontal armour, which is why this type of gun was used on virtually every German battlefield. The gun

proved indispensable in 1941, when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union and took on Stalin's superior tanks, such as the T-34.

Meanwhile, German engineers set about developing a tank that could carry the heavy gun in its turret. The result was the infamous Tiger, which surpassed everything the enemy had in terms of firepower.

Near the war's end, anti-tank guns were effective thanks to their simple design, which allowed untrained soldiers to operate them. For example, half-track vehicles could pull an *Acht-acht* (Eight-Eight) to the front, where the gun could be positioned and camouflaged to defend roads.

RUN: The range of the gun was 15 km horizontally and 8 km vertically. Not even the 90-mm-thick frontal armour of a Soviet KV-1 tank could withstand the shells if the range was under 2 km. When deployed against tanks in 1940, some models were fitted with a shield.

OUTRIGGERS: With the wheels removed and the four outriggers folded down, the gun could be swivelled to fire in any direction. Soldiers could set them up in 2½ minutes. No preparation was needed to fire at targets straight ahead.



Ardennes forests, from where German forces approached. The paratroopers were in a miserable state – because they were supposed to be convalescing behind the front line, they'd not been issued with winter gear. The soldiers lacked woollen underwear and thick socks, and only wore their regular coats on top of their uniforms. The thunder of large guns and regular bursts of gunfire could be heard in the distance as they marched towards Bastogne on both sides of the road. Between the two columns, a mob of US troops fled in the opposite direction. They were from different units, running from the enemy in chaotic fashion.

"Run! Run! They'll murder you! They'll kill you! They've got everything, tanks, machine guns, air power, everything!" paratrooper Major Dick Winters heard a man shout. The mob was apparently gripped by collective terror.

"They were just babbling. It was pathetic. We felt ashamed," Winters later recalled.

Each man had only a few magazines of ammunition, and some were completely unarmed because their weapons were being repaired in France. Therefore, they took cartridges

and hand grenades from the fleeing troops. No one protested, because without weapons, the terrified men would unlikely be forced back to the front. War correspondent Jack Belden described the retreat:

"I noticed in myself a feeling that I had not had for some years. It was the feeling of guilt that seems to come over you whenever you

Without tanks and fighter jets to support them, US soldiers surrendered to the Germans in their hundreds during the first days of the Wacht am Rhein offensive.



The gun's ammunition could be varied depending on whether the target was tanks or aircraft.

LOADING MECHANISM:

Despite its size, the gun fired 15-20 rounds every minute with a ten-man crew. When a soldier placed the shell on the slide, it was pulled into the chamber automatically.

retreat. You don't like to look anyone in the eyes. It seems as if you have done something wrong. I perceived this feeling in others, too."

As the scattered units tried to put as much distance between themselves and Bastogne as possible, the 101st Airborne Division marched straight into the town.

Hitler's commando disguised himself

Although Operation Stösser had ended in complete failure, it had an unexpected side effect. US troops stumbled on to small groups of Major Heydte's men everywhere, and they believed the Germans' mission was to ambush them behind every tree in the forest.

This misguided observation caused already-frayed nerves to develop into paranoia when military police stopped a jeep entering the Belgian city of Liege on 20th December 1944. The four men in the vehicle wore US Army uniforms and spoke English but had no travel documents to explain their intent. When the jeep was searched, the MPs uncovered German weapons and explosives.

During interrogation, a German lieutenant revealed his name. Günther Schulz belonged to a special force of English-speaking soldiers travelling behind the US front line, carrying out sabotage and misdirecting enemy troops. Behind them, an entire force would follow with the aim of taking a bridge under the nose of the Americans using captured Allied vehicles. Both missions were part of Operation Greif (Griffin), led by SS officer Otto Skorzeny, Hitler's favourite commando.

Schulz also revealed that another commando force had been dispatched to Eisenhower's headquarters to assassinate the Allied commander. According to Schulz, 80 accomplices were already in Paris.

"The report was astonishing," Eisenhower later recounted. "For several months I had been driving everywhere around France with no more protection than that provided by an orderly and an aide who habitually rode in the car with me."

Eisenhower was forced to remain at his headquarters, even though the assassination plot turned out to be nothing more than a rumour among Skorzeny's men. Whether Lieutenant Schulz believed the plan or was conning his captors remained to be seen. In any case, the masquerade came to an abrupt end. German soldiers in US uniforms were not protected by the Geneva Convention, so Schulz was executed and the rest of the commando mission ended in equal failure. Jeep patrols managed to cut telephone lines and switch road signs here and there, but they failed to capture any bridges.

German prisoner saw Hitler's problem

At the Führer's headquarters in Adlerhorst, bad news was not allowed to spoil the mood. Hitler remained unwavering in his belief in victory and his optimism was contagious among fanatical Nazis and young officers. More experienced men drew different

conclusions from the information coming in from the front. One of them was General Otto Elfeldt, a prisoner of war in the UK, who shared his analysis of the Battle of the Bulge with other Germans. Little did he realise that his British guards were listening in.

"It's Wednesday today, and if they have advanced only 40 kilometres in five days, I can only say that that is no offensive. A slow-moving offensive is no good at all because it allows the enemy to bring up reserves far too quickly," was his assessment. Elfeldt was right, and other experienced generals were shocked by the obvious shortcomings in the plan that Hitler had personally laid out with a group of cowed assistants. Hitler viewed the cold and fog of winter as an advantage, but when the Germans had attacked through the Ardennes in 1940, the area's few substandard roads were as hard as concrete in the summer heat. In the first days of the current offensive, the frost had yet to set in and the roads were so muddy that tracked vehicles had to pull lorries. Furthermore, the soldiers remained vulnerable to attack from the superior Allied air force as soon as the fog lifted.

As Hitler's troops crept forwards, Eisenhower pulled in more troops. If the soldiers could hold out for a few more days, help would arrive from quieter parts of the front. Therefore, the army commander issued a rare Order of the Day on 22nd December:

"By rushing out from his fixed defences the enemy may give us a chance to turn his great gamble into his worst defeat. So, I call upon every man of all the Allies to rise now to new heights of courage, of resolution, and of effort. Let everyone hold before him a single thought – to destroy the enemy on the ground, in the air, everywhere. Destroy him! United in this determination and with unshakable faith in the cause for which we fight, we will, with God's help, go forward to our victory."

US panic subsided. Their resistance delayed the invaders, although Hitler's forces continued to advance in the southern Ardennes. On 21st December, Germans surrounded Bastogne and the paratroopers in the town.

Bastogne refused to surrender

A German lieutenant quickly delivered an ultimatum to General Anthony McAuliffe, who commanded the besieged Americans in the important traffic hub.

"The fortune of war is changing. This time the USA forces in and near Bastogne have been encircled by strong German armoured units ... There is only one possibility to save the encircled USA troops from total annihilation: that is the honourable surrender of the encircled town," the lieutenant's note read, adding that if the Americans didn't surrender, German artillery would annihilate them and Bastogne's civilian population.

General McAuliffe reacted spontaneously with a short one-word outburst: *"Nuts."* He sent this ►

Germans wore white anoraks during battles in the snow.



Matching white trousers could be laced up to keep snow out.



US soldiers struggled in snow that lay heavily on, for example, this machine gun mounted on a jeep. German soldiers were better equipped for the cold with camouflage suits and winter coats.

response back with the German lieutenant, who had to translate the expression to his own commanders: "Go to hell."

McAuliffe was extremely pleased with his answer, which he had printed and distributed to all his troops around Bastogne. It would also bring him fame in the US and a quick promotion. First, however, his division

had to fight a horrific battle – the 101st Airborne Division would fight on from their foxholes surrounding the Belgian city over the Christmas period, a siege that paratrooper Arnold H Kantola recorded in his diary.

"December 21, 1944: Hope never to have another night like last night. The enemy threw everything they could find. They tried to break through. I was scared stiff. Didn't expect to live until the next day."

"December 22, 1944: Things sure are hot over here. Still being shelled very hard. Had to move our CP. Had a stiff firefight last night. Had a little snow last night. I am still cold and hungry. Feet wet all the time."

"December 23, 1944: Close to zero weather last night. Was a good sight when they dropped resupplies today. Food, ammo, etc. Been cut off from the rest of the world since we've come here. Half starving half freezing."

"December 24, 1944: Germans tried to break through last night. Hot firefight plus plenty of artillery. Jerry planes strafed and bombed us last night ... We are still surrounded."

In the centre, more and more wounded piled up, as no one from the overcrowded field hospitals could be evacuated. But in the middle of the ruins, the paratroopers heard over the radio that legendary general George Patton was rushing to the rescue.

Peiper's panzer force ran dry

Meanwhile, the Germans were running out of fuel. North of Bastogne, Joachim Peiper ran into major difficulties. His SS battle group had to repeatedly change route as bridges over rivers and streams were blown up in front of them, as the Americans unexpectedly fought hard in every village. Of his original 86 tanks, Peiper had only 19 left, and their fuel tanks were almost empty. After Büllingen, Peiper's soldiers failed to capture a single depot before the enemy set fire to the indispensable fuel, and the battle group received no German supplies either. After a few days, the Americans cut off the road behind the battle group, which was now left alone in enemy territory. Soldier Günther Brückner summed up the bitter feeling:

"We were so well equipped, beautiful weapons, but what is the use of having a brand-new tank, but no gas? What is the use of having a machine gun when I have no more ammunition?"

Peiper had been caught up in Hitler's ill-conceived plan and US forces closed in to wipe out the remnants of his battle group. Now the battle was no longer about crossing the Meuse, but avoiding annihilation, and the battle group sent a distress call over the radio:

"Position considerably worsened. Meagre supplies of infantry ammunition left. Forced to

HOW...

...the Ardennes offensive might have succeeded

No German generals believed in Hitler's Operation Wacht am Rhein in the Ardennes. Instead, they suggested an alternative strategy that could have turned the desperate push into a victory.

The battle for Western Europe had to be won in the same way as the war against France in 1940: an advance through the Ardennes, where no enemy expected to encounter tank divisions, and from there on to the port city of Antwerp. Once the enemy forces were cut in half, the northern pocket could be driven into the sea. This was Hitler's so-called grand solution in 1944.

"The worst prepared German offensive of this war" is how General Walter Model described the plan. His divisions were to advance more than 200 km through enemy territory. But they had neither the strength nor the

fuel to do so. He and the commander-in-chief in the west, Gerd von Rundstedt, each proposed their own variant with less ambitious goals. German troops would break through, swing around behind the US troops and surround them. The generals' solution would cost the US an army and a half at a time when they were already short of soldiers. The loss should make the Allies abandon the war or put them at a disadvantage, so the fall of Germany could be postponed. However, Hitler demanded his grand solution, and so drained the German Wehrmacht of its last mobile forces.



Walter Model (centre) lost Hitler's respect when Operation Wacht am Rhein ground to a halt.

I know the war is lost. The enemy superiority is too great. I have been betrayed. ■ Adolf Hitler on the outcome of the Battle of the Bulge.

yield Stoumont and Cheneux during the night. This is the last chance of breaking out."

There was no question of rescuing Peiper's spearhead, so he was authorised to make an escape attempt.

"When I received that message, I realised that the only chance was to break out without any vehicles and wounded. Accordingly on 24th December, at 01.00, we abandoned all our vehicles and started walking back," Peiper reported.

The lightly wounded followed, while the rest were left to the mercy of the enemy, which was far from guaranteed. Rumours of SS soldiers shooting PoWs and civilians were rife, and many Americans retaliated in kind. Retribution was tolerated at all levels – all the way up to General Omar Bradley.

Peiper made it back to the German lines with around 800 men, about a quarter of the force he originally went into battle with. With the defeat of the battle group, the offensive in the northern Ardennes was over. Hitler's last hope now lay to the south.

Soldiers' bittersweet Christmas

Shortly before Christmas, the fog lifted. Although the soldiers were still freezing, celebration gripped many on 24th December. They yelled Christmas greetings to each other between foxholes and went to church, sharing a peaceful moment with the locals. Lieutenant Charles Stockell from the US saw the fighting die down in his part of the Ardennes Forest:

"In the frosty gloom voices were raised in the old familiar Christmas carols. The heavy snowflakes fell softly, covering the weapons and signs of war. The infantry, in their front-line positions, could hear voices 200 yards away in the dark joining them, in German, in the words to Silent Night. It was a time when all men could join in the holy and sacred memories of the story of the Christ Child, and renew a fervent prayer for peace, goodwill toward men!"

The song was also heard along a railway track in the south of the Netherlands. There

ran a whole trainload of freight cars filled with US PoWs from the unfortunate 106th Infantry Division. A beautiful, practised tenor voice broke out in *Silent Night*. Others joined in from neighbouring wagons, and the German guards also sang along.

The prisoners had little to be happy about. They waited for packed train carriages to transport them eastwards into Nazi Germany. Private Kurt Vonnegut was among those imprisoned on the railway tracks.

"We were loaded and locked up, sixty men to each small, unventilated, unheated box car. There were no sanitary accommodations – the floors were covered with fresh cow dung. There wasn't room for all of us to lie down. Half slept while the other half stood. We spent several days, including Christmas, on that Limberg siding. On Christmas Eve the Royal Air Force bombed and strafed our unmarked train. They killed about one-hundred-and-fifty of us," wrote Vonnegut.

The Germans failed to paint red crosses on the carriages, so British pilots had no idea they were targeting PoWs. Some managed to take cover when a skinny man wriggled through an opening and pulled open the sliding door from the outside. Everyone was recaptured afterwards. Back in the wagons, the tenor was asked to sing again, but he'd been killed.

Conversely, the Allies received a Christmas present when parachute officer von der Heydte was captured ►

C-47 transport aircraft drop supplies over the Belgian town of Bastogne during Christmas week. Here, paratroopers from the 101st Airborne Division were surrounded and besieged by the Germans.



by American troops. The next morning, the war started again.

Help arrived with crazy general

The belligerent US armoured general Patton rose, looked to the heavens and exclaimed: *"Lovely weather for killing Germans."* His tanks headed towards Bastogne. Now Patton's forces approached from the south at high speed.

"The Kraut has stuck his head in the meat grinder and I've got the handle," Patton boasted to his superior Bradley.

Like Peiper, Patton pushed his forces forward at a rapid pace, draining his troops and increasing casualties. Inside Bastogne, fires raged after German air raids, while the besieged could hear the fighting nearby. Every morning they hoped Patton would finally arrive.

On 26th December, a force of US Sherman tanks broke through the German lines and by late afternoon made contact with the besieged paratroopers. The city's defenders still had enemies on all sides, but now a narrow corridor had opened to the outside world. Supplies could flow in and the wounded be evacuated out. When the news reached the headquarters in Adlerhorst, Hitler felt the sucker punch:

"I know the war is lost. The enemy superiority is too great. I have been betrayed."

He raged, blaming his generals, accusing them of lacking the courage to win, and harking back to the failed bomb attack on his life in July 1944: *"I pampered and decorated them, and that was all*

the thanks I got. My best course now is to put a bullet in my head. I lacked hard fighters," grumbled the Führer.

Hitler, however, had no intention of shooting himself yet: *"We will not capitulate, ever. We may go down, but we will take the world with us,"* Hitler's death sentence for the German people read.

Offensive postponed the war's end

As always, Hitler's acceptance of Germany's true situation was short-lived. A few days later, he planned a new offensive to begin on New Year's Eve.

In the Ardennes, German soldiers were ordered to defend everything they'd captured. The fighting raged on until 25th January, when the Allies found themselves back on the same front line as before the offensive. By this time, the Americans had lost over 100,000 men, 19,000 of whom were dead. Although the German advance had been futile, it delayed Allied plans to invade Germany by five to six weeks.

Suddenly, the Western Front lost its importance as Stalin launched a major offensive in Poland in the New Year and all German forces had to be redeployed eastwards. Hitler headed to Berlin and never returned to Adlerhorst again.

SS officer Joachim Peiper was captured after the war and charged with war crimes. He escaped execution and in 1956 was released as the last German war criminal from the Ardennes. But his legacy coloured the war's finale; the Western Front had become as vengeful, bitter and blood red as in the east. ■

AT THE SAME TIME

HUNGARY:

- The Soviet siege of Budapest begins.

EAST PRUSSIA:

- The Red Army invades.

BERLIN:

- Hitler barricades himself in the Führerbunker.



The fortunes of war turned in January 1945 when Allied troops regained lost ground. But the effort cost lives and time.

Hitler attempted another headless thrust



German forces were still advancing through the Ardennes on 21st December, but they would never reach the port of Antwerp. Even Hitler realised this. On the other hand, the advance had created a new opportunity.

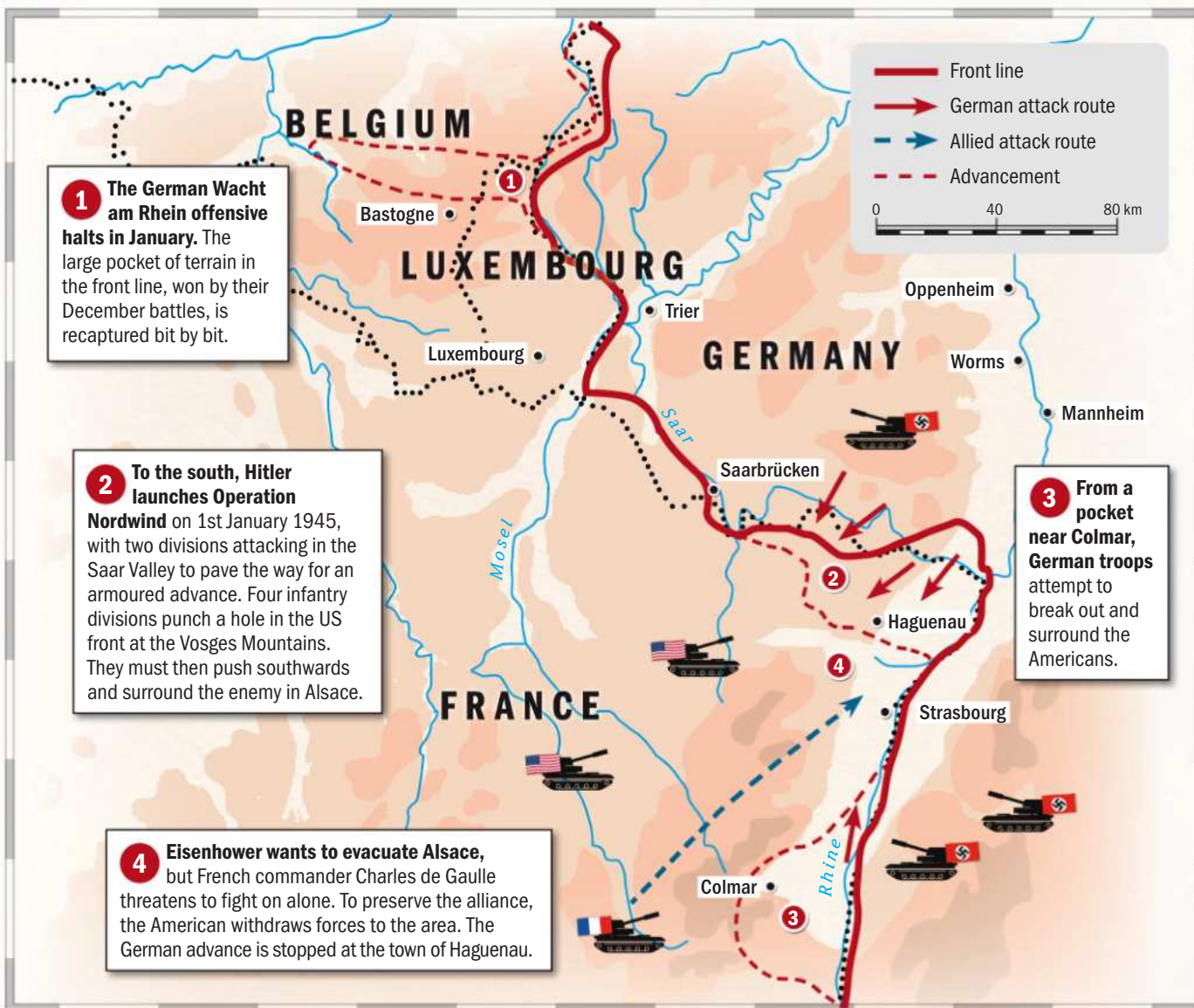
To the south in Alsace, Allied General Eisenhower had drastically diluted his forces to send reinforcements to the Ardennes. The US Seventh Army now stood alone to defend a front line 110 km long, which Hitler intended to destroy with Operation *Nordwind* (Northwind), due to begin on New Year's Eve. If the attack succeeded, he could then crush the Third Army with Operation

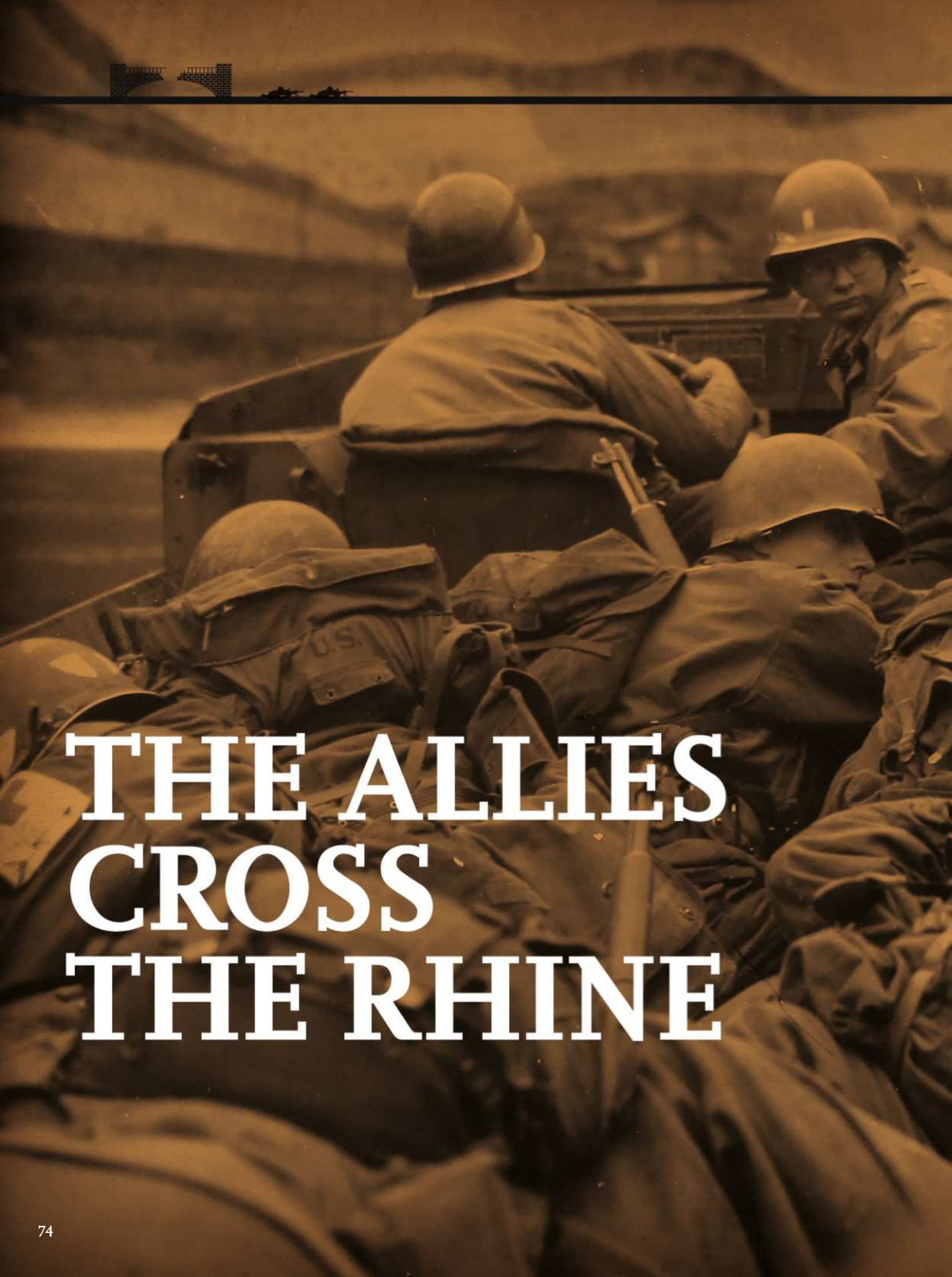
Zahnarzt (Dentist). Hitler had learned that his army no longer had the strength for large, war-deciding campaigns. Instead, troops must conduct smaller, more realistic operations that could drain the enemy's strength – just as his generals had advised him to do in the Ardennes.

However, Operation *Nordwind* ran into problems almost immediately. Hitler had already exhausted the army's forces in the Ardennes, so the new offensive was launched with forces that were far too weak. The offensive triggered only a brief US crisis before the German advance was halted and reversed.



Two young *Waffen SS* soldiers are captured during Operation *Nordwind*.






THE ALLIES CROSS THE RHINE

Germany, spring 1945

The operation to land on the German side of the Rhine was the size of the D-Day landings. US soldiers crossed the river in amphibious vehicles.

A sepia-toned photograph showing US soldiers in amphibious vehicles during the Rhine crossing. The soldiers are wearing helmets and combat uniforms, looking alertly. The vehicles are crowded, and the background shows a river and distant land.

It was a mighty olive-green river that surged steadily and inevitably over Germany.

Journalist Richard C Hottelet on the paratroopers' arrival.

The Allies cross the Rhine

In March 1945, the Allies prepared to cross the River Rhine, a liquid line of defence that wound along Germany's western border. Guns, tanks and hundreds of thousands of soldiers were deployed in an attempt to remove the last German defences and advance deep into the heart of Nazi Germany.

By Benjamin Christensen

The flak was intense as US C-46 transport planes carrying paratroopers flew over the Rhine in the early hours of 24th March 1945. Down on the ground, Allied troop forces fought their way across the river, and the planes' pilots could gaze down on the final advance into Nazi Germany, which had eventually begun there in the early spring of 1945. For weeks, a thick blanket of smoke had covered the Rhine's western bank, so while the Germans knew that an invasion was imminent, they had no inkling that a million Allied soldiers, guns, tanks, engineers and landing craft were on their way. Meanwhile, thousands of paratroopers were about to parachute down on the eastern side of the Rhine.

At the same time, the green signal light lit up as the jumpmaster yelled for the men to get ready. Bergmann looked at his commander, Captain Reynolds, who'd never previously shown any signs of fear. The officer was now as pale as a sheet, beads of sweat trickling down his forehead.

Reynolds's voice shook as he gave the order to jump, and Bergmann immediately exited the plane.

Within seconds of his chute opening, the paratrooper felt himself buffeted through

the air by a nearby explosion. The pressure was so intense that Bergmann was unable to open his eyes.

Although somehow unharmed despite the flak's impact, Bergmann quickly realised he was in flames. The explosion had ignited one of his smoke grenades, which now spewed burning phosphorus as he plummeted to the ground.

Convinced his time was up, Bergmann muttered a quick prayer before the molten nylon started to burn his skin. He finally landed, now screaming in pain. Quickly cutting himself free from his parachute, Bergmann rolled into a waterlogged ditch to extinguish the flames. Burned and in shock, Bill Bergmann and the rest of his unit had nevertheless crossed the Rhine. The invasion of Nazi Germany was underway.

Generals vied for glory

The airborne forces operation, codenamed Varsity, was just one part of the gigantic Allied invasion. It was the largest parachute drop in world history, with over 16,000 paratroopers. At the same time, thousands of bombers buzzed over Germany, while thousands more troops, heavy guns and mortars were transported across the Rhine in landing craft and amphibious

The sky was dotted with planes on 24th March over the German town of Kevelaer. The largest parachute operation in history was underway.



vehicles in an operation as extensive as the Normandy landings the previous June.

Dwight D Eisenhower, as commander-in-chief of Allied forces in the west, knew the attack had to be overwhelming if it were to crush the faltering enemy with one merciless blow. By March 1945, the Allies' resources were stretched, and if the Germans slowed their advance, the Soviets might be able to capture more territory than agreed, while Germany's senior leadership might even be able to retreat to the Alps. There, Allied intelligence believed an *Alpenfestung* (Alpine Fortress) would serve to prolong the war as the Nazis' last bastion.

When Eisenhower met with his senior generals in early February, he faced having to pick one to lead the main attack due to the supply shortage. Bernard Montgomery's forces were at the northern part of the front, while Omar Bradley's fortified the centre. Both generals argued that their army groups should be given the honour of the breakthrough, but Eisenhower chose Montgomery and his Anglo-Canadian forces for the main attack, and soon after, units and essential equipment were transferred across the front to Montgomery's armies in the north.

However, both Bradley and General Jacob Devers, whose army group of US and French troops covered the southern front, were authorised to make small supporting advances across the river. That evening, Bradley broke the news to George Patton, who reacted with his customary fury at not being chosen to lead the main attack against the Germans.

"I'm convinced that we have a much better chance to get to the Rhine first ... But what are we supposed to be doing in the meantime?" asked the former cavalry officer.

Bradley promised Patton that he would be free to attack as long as casualties were kept low and ammunition didn't run out. Defiant, Patton noted in his diary:

"I will be the first on the Rhine yet." His US troops therefore set off before the British were ready to implement their large-scale invasion plan.

Bridge survived German explosives

Even Patton realised that there was no easy passage across the Rhine as his forces reached the river and readied themselves to cross. German engineering troops had attempted to blow up all bridges to prevent them from falling into enemy hands, so it was with great joy and surprise that on 7th March, US troops arrived in the spa town of Remagen to discover that against all odds, the town's great railway bridge remained intact.

US Brigadier General William Hoge had been instructed to continue south and risked court martial if he disobeyed his orders, but the potential rewards of capturing a road across one of the last remaining



German army commander **Albert Kesselring** was tasked with opposing the invasion. He approached the task with equal parts optimism and cynicism.

bridges over the Rhine outweighed the risks; Hoge's men would make an attempt to capture it.

As Hoge sent his soldiers forward, Captain Willy Bratge and his men on the German side of the river were preparing to blow up the Remagen bridge.

"They had reached the bridge. I told him, 'Friesenhahn blow the bridge, blow it up!'" Bratge recalled after the war. The engineering company commander's response was blunt:

"I have no permission," Captain Friesenhahn replied. *"Major Scheller is the only one who can give the order for demolition."*

But Scheller was over 300 metres away on the other side of a hill, and the only way the two German soldiers could reach him was through a long tunnel, which would take precious time. Nevertheless, Bratge immediately set off running.

"I dashed off through the dark tunnel to Major Scheller. I reported to him: 'The Americans are going to cross the bridge,'" he recalled.

Horried, Scheller immediately gave Bratge the order to blow up the bridge, who rushed back through the tunnels: *"As soon as he could hear me, I shouted to him: 'Friesenhahn, blow up the bridge!'"*

The bridge commander dutifully twisted the detonator's knob and a deafening boom followed as the explosives placed along the bridge exploded. US Sergeant Joseph DeLisio witnessed the explosion.

"As far as we know, we actually saw the bridge lift up off its foundations. There was dust and ▶

FACTS

While the Western Allies attacked Germany, Soviet soldiers had occupied the area up to the Oder River. **The two generals Zhukov and Konev stood just 65 kilometres from Berlin on 22nd March 1945.**

debris thrown all over, and after a while you couldn't see the bridge any more. It wasn't too long, the dust cleared, the bridge was still standing," the American recalled about the German attempt, which fortunately for the Allies had failed, even though the bridge was left swaying.

It was an unlikely stroke of luck for the Americans, who found themselves with a unique opportunity to capture an intact and usable bridge that led across the Rhine right into the heart of Germany. With bullets from German machine guns whistling in their ears, the US troops charged forward. Only a few German soldiers defended the bridge, and they couldn't hold back the Americans. In haste, the Germans fled into the darkened tunnel at the end of the bridge.

Willi Bratge was among their number, only to discover that Scheller had fled, leaving him in command of the major's platoon. Quickly, the German tried to establish a new defence against the advancing

enemy: "Captain Friesenhahn and I rushed to the tunnel exit... At a distance of approximately 120 metres in front of us, a machine gun fired right into the tunnel," the captain recalled, realising that there was nothing more he could do – the battle for the bridge had been lost.

The capture of the intact bridge over the Rhine was such a surprise that the Allies hadn't even considered the possibility. But now all available units rushed to the area to cross the river and secure a bridgehead on the opposite bank.

Patton marked his territory

The unexpected breakthrough at Remagen was stunning, but it failed to change the invasion plan. In the north, Montgomery continued to prepare for his big attack that would begin on the night of 23rd-24th March. But Patton was determined to beat Montgomery to the punch, and on the night of 22nd-23rd March, the US general was ready to send his forces across the Rhine south of Mainz at Oppenheim.

The manoeuvre caught the Germans completely unawares. With 500 attack boats, landing craft and amphibious vehicles, the Americans managed to land the bulk of two divisions during the night. The following morning, Patton called General Omar Bradley.

"Brad, don't tell anyone, but I'm across," he reported, much to Bradley's surprise.

By the end of the day, Patton had transported two infantry divisions and an armoured division across the river, and his engineering troops were constructing a pontoon bridge to ensure the flow of supplies and reinforcements.

The next day, the bombastic Patton strode out on to the completed bridge. In the middle, he stopped, unbuttoned his trousers and urinated in the Rhine.

"I've waited a long time to do that. I didn't even piss this morning when I got up so I would have a really full load. Yes, sir, the pause that refreshes," said the general as he buttoned his trousers and took the final steps across the river.

As Patton sneaked across the Rhine under cover of darkness, his British rival Bernard Montgomery had done little to mask the fact that the big attack in the west would come from his sector. Since 11th March, air forces had dropped over 50,000 tonnes of bombs on German positions on the Rhine's east bank. The Germans were aware of the attack but were powerless. Commander-in-chief Albert Kesselring lacked virtually everything and would have to rely on the fact that the men at his disposal were experienced and would now be fighting in their homeland. Hitler promised 1,331 new tanks, but as was so often the case with Hitler's promises, they weren't delivered and Kesselring realised that this time there would be no reinforcements.

In Berlin on 23rd March, Hitler barely had time to worry about the defence of the Rhine. Instead of ►

The highly belligerent General George Patton was desperate to cross the Rhine before his British rival Montgomery.

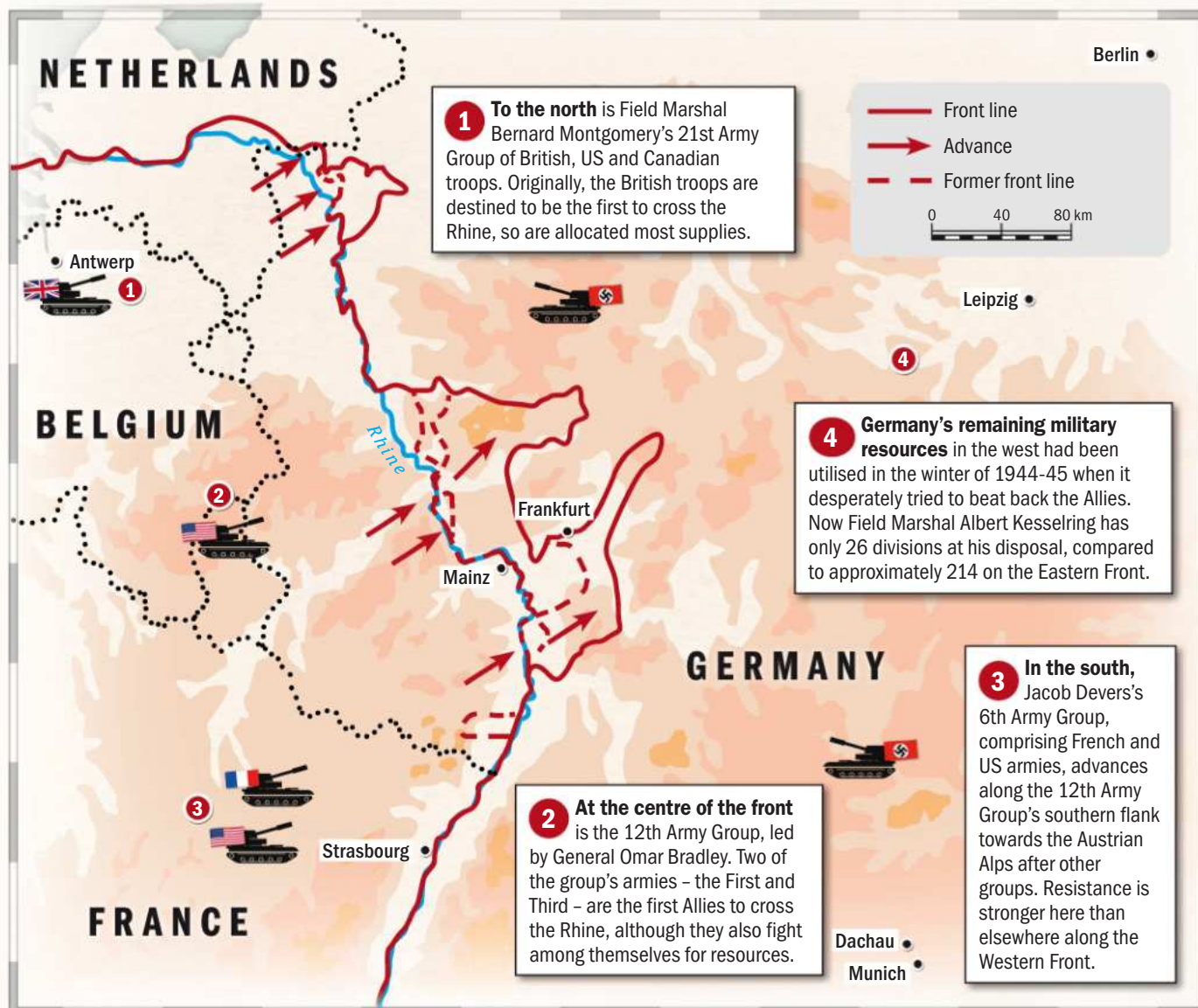


Allied armies had to fight in shifts

After D-Day, the Allies took their time consolidating their position in Europe. Nevertheless, supply lines became stretched to the limit during the campaigns in the Netherlands, Belgium and later Germany. The situation should have improved after the capture of the important Belgian port of Antwerp in November 1944, but when three Allied army groups, each led by a charismatic general, were poised to launch attacks against the heartland of the Third Reich in March 1945, the supply routes were still a mess. The Allies couldn't gather enough supplies to conduct major offensives with all three army groups at the same time, so the three generals found themselves competing for resources, sometimes taking turns.



The tunnel at Remagen was the first piece of territory taken by the Allies on the other side of the Rhine.



The brooch denoted membership of the Nazi resistance group Werwolf.



Members were meant to sabotage the enemy advance, but their actions were, in practice, insignificant.

providing reinforcements for his hard-pressed men, the Führer preferred to discuss with engineers how wide a newly constructed runway along Berlin's Tiergarten Street should be.

That same evening, Montgomery launched his attack. Kesselring had only 69,000 men and 45 tanks at his disposal. Montgomery stood ready with approximately 1.2 million soldiers and 5,481 pieces of artillery, warning up to bomb the eastern side of the Rhine.

Montgomery slept through attacks

As usual, Bernard Montgomery went to bed at exactly 22.00. At that very moment, the first of his units marched aboard landing craft and amphibious vehicles nicknamed buffaloes to cross the Rhine. A commando on one of the first vessels cheekily shouted to his comrades:

"Hannibal crossed the Alps with elephants. We're making history crossing the Rhine with buffaloes."

The soldiers ducked into the boats as the German line went up in a deafening inferno of explosions

while Allied guns opened fire on the landing sites. As the Allied attack boats approached the shore, the artillery bombardment moved more inland to strike defence positions further back. The bombardment battered the German troops, who sometimes put up surprisingly little resistance.

That was the experience of Corporal Fred Taylor from one such unit. The commando was one of the first ashore and in the darkness could make out the silhouette of three Germans ahead. He hastily pulled out his bayonet and waved it in the air in front of him. The Germans emerged with their hands up, shouting *"Kamerad! Kamerad!"* ("Friend! Friend!").

It was then that the corporal realised he wasn't waving a bayonet, but a stick – nevertheless, the Germans surrendered. From there, the Allied soldiers moved into the countryside, where they met much stiffer resistance.

US soldier Mel Cline was part of an infantry unit that came under fire from German shells and machine guns, and Cline had

The bridge at Remagen collapsed after ten days in Allied hands and months of artillery fire and detonation attempts. By then, six divisions had crossed the bridges.



to rush for cover: *"We were flat, prone on our bellies. This German machine gunner was directly to our front. That was the only time in combat that I fired aimed shots like we did on the range in training. We could see this German come up from his hole, fire and duck down again. I adjusted my sights, got the range, and squeezed off several clips before I finally hit his gun and put him out of action. When we reached his hole, I found the bullet had glanced off his machine gun and mangled his arm."*

Two men in Cline's unit were killed in the attack, whose purpose was to help establish a pair of large bridgeheads on the

eastern side of the Rhine from which the British could continue their campaign and advance into Germany.

Paratroopers were fired on

As day dawned over the banks of the Rhine on 24th March, one British and one US parachute division were dropped behind the landing zones. The troops' goal was to secure control of key traffic junctions so that the Germans couldn't mount a counter-attack against the bridgeheads. US front-line reporter Richard C Hottel was on board an observation aircraft when the huge Allied air armada appeared on the horizon west of the Rhine, heading towards Germany.

"We saw the solid phalanxes of olive-green troop carriers and tow planes and gliders▶





LVT-4

LANDING VEHICLE

The buffalo brought soldiers safely ashore

In the Pacific War, specialised 'buffalo' landing craft carried supplies ashore to the islands. During the campaign in Germany, they proved ideal for transporting soldiers across the Rhine.

Its specially designed caterpillar tracks meant the LVT-4 could sail through water, drive on to a beach or riverbank and lead soldiers directly into battle. The landing craft's design was based on a vessel designed to

rescue people from the Everglades swamps in Florida. The LVT became known to British soldiers as the buffalo.

It was originally intended to play a role in the Pacific War, where Allied armies hopped from

island to island to defeat Japanese forces, but in 1945 the LVT-4 was needed in Europe to cross the Rhine. Here, Montgomery's troops had 600 buffaloes at their disposal, some of which were equipped with smaller guns.

MACHINE GUNS: The Buffalo had two .30- or .50-calibre mounted machine guns that could be operated by the soldiers being transported.

AIRCRAFT ENGINE: Before the war, the Americans prioritised the development of aircraft engines, which they chose to use in tanks and landing craft, as these required more muscle power. The LVT's engine was therefore larger than standard tank engines, forcing the designer to make the LVT taller than was ideal. As a result, the vehicle proved a relatively easy target.



Pontoon bridges ensured dry passage after LVTs cleared the way.



CAPACITY: Between 30 and 40 soldiers could be on board in addition to the two drivers. The buffalo could also accommodate a jeep or a small field gun. At the back, the LVT had a lowerable ramp to keep soldiers under cover as they disembarked.

CATERPILLAR TRACKS: The LVT's big advantage over other landing craft was its caterpillar tracks. It could drive on to land to deliver soldiers closer to the enemy. Unlike regular caterpillar tracks, the buffalo had small paddles designed to propel it forwards in the water. On land, it travelled well on sand or mud, but not on grass.

nose to tail ... It was a mighty olive-green river that surged steadily and inevitably over Germany," the journalist wrote.

Before long, heavy shelling hit the aircraft. German propaganda claimed that the anti-aircraft fire would be so dense that the Allied soldiers could save their parachutes and march down on a carpet of shells instead. Indeed, the shelling was so heavy that it made an impression even on the most experienced soldiers. One US veteran of D-Day noted that the shelling on the Rhine was worse than what he had experienced in Normandy.

There "was no comparison" he said, while a British officer believed that "this drop made Arnhem look like a Sunday picnic".

In a German anti-aircraft unit, Sergeant Valentin Klopsch and his men stood ready to receive the paratroopers as they jumped.


"Coming from across the Rhine there was a roaring and booming in the air. In waves aircraft were approaching at different heights. And then the paratroopers were jumping, the chutes were opening like mushrooms. It looked like lines of pearls loosening from the planes," Klopsch said. His

men, who had thought their work done after the bombers had passed over, immediately opened fire.

"But what a superiority of the enemy in weapons, in men, in equipment. The sky was full of paratroopers, and then new waves came in," Klopsch realised shortly afterwards.

Private John Cobb had landed with his burned comrade Bill Bergmann, whose smoke grenades had set fire to his parachute on the way down. The two men immediately came under fire from a German machine gun, but they managed to take cover. A lieutenant passed by and asked if Cobb was carrying a bazooka. When the private answered yes, he was ordered to get it unpacked.

Not far away, a German tank prepared for battle. In haste, Cobb loaded his bazooka and fired two shots into the caterpillar tracks of the tank, slowing it down. Cobb and Bergmann's proficiency was typical of the Allied troops, who rained down from the sky for over two and a half hours. The sheer number of paratroopers ensured that the Allies reached their objectives in a matter of hours, securing control of crucial transport hubs. The Allied bridgeheads on the German side grew steadily in the days after 24th ►



Churchill calmly strolled ashore on the German side of the Rhine. The audacious visit irritated several Allied generals.

WHAT IF...

...the Soviets had reached Hamburg and Denmark before the Western Allies?

During the Yalta Conference in February 1945, the Allied leaders carved up Europe between them. But in the final weeks of the war, the Soviets acted as though they had no intention of honouring the agreement.

As the war drew to a close, tensions between the Allied powers grew and Winston Churchill realised that the Soviet Union would not voluntarily give up territory once it was occupied. In the early days of May 1945, the Western Allies realised that Soviet armoured units were rapidly approaching Northern Germany and the Danish border. The Soviet advance hinted that Joseph Stalin had dreams of capturing a port close to the Atlantic Ocean – for example in Hamburg or Jutland. Therefore, Churchill sent Canadian paratroopers, who'd landed behind enemy lines while crossing the Rhine, to the town of Wismar on the Baltic.

The Canadians stormed through German territory that hadn't yet officially fallen with

tanks and lorries, passing large groups of German soldiers. On 2nd May, they reached Wismar, blocking the Soviets' path to Lübeck and from there on to Hamburg and Denmark. In the meantime, British troops were able to capture and position themselves in Lübeck, where the agreed border was to be located.

If the Canadian troops hadn't succeeded in their mission, history could have been very different. Denmark and Northern Germany could have been occupied by the Soviet Union during a time of inflamed grand politics, when arguments were fuelled by nuclear armament and advanced positions. Greenland and the Faroe Islands would then have been obvious Soviet bases. In the long term, Denmark would

have had a Soviet-friendly puppet government, as happened in East Germany, and the Danish military would probably have been reorganised along Soviet lines.

Denmark had a taste of Soviet occupation when the Red Army occupied Bornholm in the Baltic Sea on 9th May 1945. As the island was within the territory that the Soviets were authorised to target according to the Yalta Conference, they did not leave after the war ended. For over a year, the Soviets took advantage of Bornholm's strategic location and demanded that the Danish state pay for the costs of the occupation. It wasn't until 1946 that Stalin's forces left the island as a gesture of diplomatic goodwill.



British troops liberated Copenhagen on 5th May. After the war, Danes feared that the Soviets would occupy the country.

March, and forces advanced rapidly, supported by no fewer than 10,000 aircraft bombing anything resembling movement from German units. Pilot Elwood Quesada flew in an observation aircraft along the Rhine and reported back:

"I see a hell of a lot of Krauts streaming back toward the Rhine with their hands in the air."

Germans surrendered in rows

Although the drop and landings were comparable to D-Day, German resistance was significantly less in the hinterland than in Normandy. On the ground, Allied landing troops quickly made contact with the paratroopers and within a few days, all units that had crossed the Rhine were connected. The operation was a success. All along the river, Allied soldiers now poured into the heart of Germany. Even soldiers presumed dead found their way back to the ranks. In a headquarters on the east side of the Rhine, Colonel Lou Coutts of the US paratroopers could hardly believe his eyes when the co-pilot of the aircraft he'd jumped out of that morning arrived at Coutts's command post in the early hours of the 24th. When the colonel had jumped, the plane had been in flames:

"My God, I'm glad to see you! But I sure as hell didn't expect to! How did you do it?" Coutts asked in surprise.

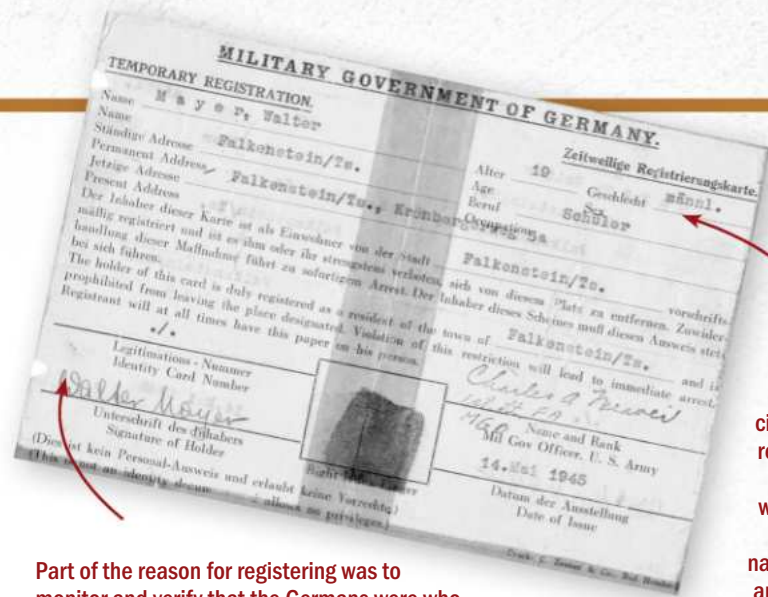
"Well, when you guys jumped out, the C-46 began floating up from 542 feet. Our pilot ... headed the plane toward Belgium. He set it on automatic pilot and the crew chief, he, and I all bailed out safely while the plane was still burning," the co-pilot explained.

"Then what in God's name are you lugging that damned heavy parachute around with you for?" the colonel asked, pointing to the lieutenant's neatly packed parachute.

"Colonel, in the air corps if you parachute out of a plane and don't bring the chute back you get your pay cheque docked thirty-two dollars and eighty-four cents," replied the co-pilot as the colonel and his staff broke down laughing.

The pilot was handed a receipt for his parachute and a rifle before being ordered to join the men protecting the command post. At General Omar Bradley's headquarters, the staff officers met in the morning hours of 24th March to get an overview of the situation. All along the front, the Allies were advancing. Over the radio, they could hear Britain's prime minister, Winston Churchill, praising Montgomery for leading the *"first assault"* across the Rhine.

Not only did Churchill praise his forces on the radio, but the PM was also at the front shortly afterwards. The politician wanted to get as close to the fighting as possible, and on 25th March spied his chance when he visited the Rhine's western bank in the company of Bernard Montgomery, from where



German citizens were registered in the final weeks of the war with name, gender and address.

Part of the reason for registering was to monitor and verify that the Germans were who they claimed to be – and not Nazis on the run.

the two men could observe Allied aircraft bombing enemy targets on the opposite bank.

"Why don't we go across and have a look at the other side?" Churchill suggested when he spotted an empty landing craft.

The British field marshal agreed to the proposal, even though the area hadn't yet been cleared of German resistance.

"We started across the river with three or four American commanders and half a dozen armed men. We landed in brilliant sunshine and perfect peace on the German shore, and walked about for half an hour or so unmolested," the prime minister recounted afterwards.

Fighting raged only a kilometre away, so Churchill was refused permission to get any closer. After being ferried back to the west bank, he attempted to cross the Rhine again – this time on foot across a shattered bridge. His curiosity nearly proved costly when German artillery observers spotted the group and called down a rain of bombs on their rickety passage. The first shells landed in the water less than 100 metres from Churchill – another volley crashed right behind them. The generals bundled the prime minister away, although Churchill himself rejoiced like a small child at getting so close to the fighting on the front line.

Pointless battles continued

The Germans lost their grip on the Rhine and so their western defences effectively ceased to exist. By 27th March, Montgomery's bridgehead was 56 kilometres wide and 32 kilometres deep. Allied units advanced everywhere, meeting only sporadic resistance. It was now obvious to every soldier on both sides of the front that the war was over, but despite this, the Germans fought on.

On the last day of March, Sergeant Schlemmer of the US 82nd Division advanced with a Sherman tank carrying six soldiers. Suddenly, the tank was hit by a ►

FACTS

The longest pontoon bridge over the Rhine was built by engineering troops from the 107th Engineer Battalion. At

417.5

metres long, it was the longest floating bridge used for tactical purposes.

Nr. 358, Montag,
9. April 1945

NACHRICHTEN FÜR DIE TRUPPE

9th April 1945

Braunschweig now in danger

Göttingen, Hildesheim and Pforzheim have fallen.

Reports of new deep Allied thrusts towards Berlin, towards the North Sea ports and southwards towards Nuremberg and Stuttgart poured in yesterday, blow by blow, from all sections in the west.

In South Hanover, Göttingen has fallen without resistance.

American troops have reached the city limits of Hanover. It is now surrounded on three sides: from the south, west and north. Half of Hildesheim is in Allied hands.

A group of more than 100 American armoured vehicles is now within 30 km of Braunschweig and, according to the latest reports, continues to roll forward without encountering resistance.

The advance ... has already placed the Allied armoured vehicles within 240 km of Berlin. Here they are now just 300 km from the Soviet army on the Eastern Front.

While the Allies between the Weser and the Elbe increase their pace of advance by the hour, they also further intensify the threat to the North Sea ports.

Bremen under attack

Eight kilometres from Bremen, the British have deployed heavy artillery, which has been firing

towards Bremen-Neustadt since yesterday. At the same time, it is reported that a strong British battle group south of Bremen has reached the Weser river on the autobahn to Hamburg.

The bridge over the Weser has blown up, but the British are currently procuring material to build a pontoon bridge across the river, apparently with the aim of making a push towards Hamburg 90 km to the north-east.

The British are also making rapid progress towards Emden and are now reported to be just 40 km from the port city.

A dramatic turning point in the fighting over the last retreat routes for German soldiers in the Netherlands occurred ... when units of British paratroopers in north-east Holland landed and occupied parts of the Zwolle-Groningen railway line in a lightning attack.

Thus, the last railway line between the Netherlands and the German Reich is severed. Canadian armoured vehicles now advance north to join the paratroopers.

The city of Zutphen, the key point of the German defence position on the IJssel, has fallen.

The same picture of an accelerating collapse also fills the latest reports from Bavaria, Württemberg and Baden.

stray shot from a German anti-tank gun, killing two of the soldiers and throwing the other four backwards.

"The force of the blast blew them to the rear of the tank near me," Schlemmer later recalled.

German Lieutenant Wenzel Andreas Borgert revealed their motivation to fight on:

"The Allies' insistence on unconditional surrender made us fight longer. If they had said, get rid of the Nazis, none of us would have objected to that. But none of the Allies said that.

"Hunger, lice, exhaustion, cold – you can never understand. Day after day of anxiety and casualties. My friend was shot in the head, one of his eyes was gone, but I could feel no more. I saw hundreds of wounded, and I could do nothing. I still have fragments in my head. Every soldier curses war," Borgert said.

The continued fighting emphasised the need to bring the Third Reich under control. The Allies feared the Nazis would establish a last stronghold in the Alps



German cities fell in a row, according to British German-language newspapers dropped over Germany in 1945.

Braunschweig jetzt in Gefahr

Göttingen, Hildesheim und Pforzheim gefallen

MELDUNGEN über neue tiefe Vorstöße der Alliierten in Richtung Berlin, gegen die Nordseeküsten und im Süden gegen Nürnberg und Stuttgart, brachten gestern Schlag auf Schlag von allen Abschnitten im Westen ein.

In Südhannover ist Göttingen ohne Widerstand gefallen. Amerikanische Truppen haben die Stadt und den Ort Hildesheim erreicht. Die Amerikaner sind in der Hand der Alliierten.

Die Amerikaner sind in der Hand der Alliierten. Die Amerikaner sind in der Hand der Alliierten.

Königsberg steht vor dem Fall

Sowjet-Panzer stossen ins Herz Wiens vor – 3 Bahnhöfe genommen

Hafen und Hauptbahnhof von Königsberg sind jetzt in Händen der Sowjets, die gestern morgen zum Sturz auf die Festung Königsberg ansetzten haben.

Sowjet-Panzer und Störgruppen durchdringen den Verteidigungsringel im Südwesten der Festung, die amerikanische Truppen über den Pegel und besetzen auch Störungskämpfe den Hauptbahnhof.

Die Kräfte in der Stadt von Königsberg stehen in einer Lage, die dem Sturz der Festung nahe ist. Die Amerikaner sind in der Hand der Alliierten.

Die Amerikaner sind in der Hand der Alliierten. Die Amerikaner sind in der Hand der Alliierten.

My friend was shot in the head, one of his eyes was gone,
but I could feel no more. ■ Lieutenant Wenzel Andreas Borgert on the bitter end of the war.

and that the German population would resort to guerrilla warfare. At the same time, Soviet troops were fighting their way towards Berlin. There was a growing fear among commanders that the Soviets would only halt their advance on the Elbe as agreed if the Western Allies reached the opposite bank first. Other generals went further, arguing that the British and Americans should go as far as taking Berlin.

By early April, Allied forces had surrounded most German resistance on the Western Front in a defensive pocket in the Ruhr. The pocket was cleared during April as the generals widened their invasion of Germany.

Eisenhower then decided that the Western Allies should not target Berlin. He knew that the area around the city would be handed over to the Soviets after the war and had no wish to sacrifice his men for a propaganda victory and risk breaking the already tenuous alliance with Stalin's troops. Instead, Omar Bradley's army group was ordered to advance to the Elbe as quickly as possible, while Patton's army, along

with the Southern Army Group, would advance towards the Alps, cut off the last possibility of resistance and take Hitler's command centre at Berghof.

Although the forces continued to face resistance, the advance seemed unstoppable.

"Day after day we roll down German roads, going ever deeper into the interior of the country. Now they are country trails, and now they are autobahns, but always they are alive with army vehicles rolling forward. You get the feeling that the army is an immense flood pouring over the countryside, tipped with violence at the crest and depositing flotsam in the backwaters. You move with the tide, and it carries you along in an almost effortless fashion," recalled a US captain named Lale.

The collapse of Nazi Germany was now just weeks away, but another shock awaited Allied soldiers. In April 1945, the first living skeletons in striped prison suits emerged. Now the world would be forced to confront the scale of the Nazis' atrocities. ■

STRENGTH RATIOS

From the attack across the Rhine to the end of the war, the **Allies lost**

62,704

men. German losses were higher: **at least**

265,000

were killed, wounded or taken prisoner.

Paratroopers from the 101st Division, who'd been fighting since D-Day, were among the first to reach Hitler's Eagle's Nest in the Alps in May 1945.





ALLIES LIBERATE THE CAMPS

“Suddenly, I realised that these stacks were naked human beings.”

Captain Belton Cooper on the Mittelbau-Dora concentration camp.

Germany, April 1945

Many concentration camp prisoners were starving and struck by typhus, with a long road back to health. Even after being freed, many continued to perish.



Allies liberate the camps

In April 1945, Allied reconnaissance units discovered fenced-off camps across Germany. To the soldiers' horror, starving prisoners staggered out from behind the barbed wire, and six years after the outbreak of war, the full extent of the Nazis' atrocities was finally revealed to soldiers, journalists and the wider world.

By Benjamin T A Christensen

US Army Captain Belton Youngblood Cooper drove into the German town of Nordhausen on 11th April 1945 as part of a column in the 3rd Armored Division. Here, he encountered a sight he would never forget.

"As we approached the corner of the next block, we saw a tall, frail-looking creature with striped pants and a white towel draped over the head. The exposed skin of his naked torso looked like translucent plastic stretched over the rib cage and sucked with a powerful vacuum until it impinged to the backbone ... There was no face, merely a gaunt human skull staring out from beneath the towel. The teeth were exposed in a broad, tragic grin, and in place of eyes were merely dark sockets," the captain later recounted.

Cooper and his unit had stumbled upon a secret German rocket factory. The Nazis had fled, taking with them most of its slave labourers, who'd been forced to build V-2 rockets. Thousands of prisoners had been transported on railway wagons away from the front and the advancing Allied forces. The remaining starving and ill workers were now left fighting for survival in the remains of the Nordhausen factory.

"As we proceeded down the road, we encountered several more of these gaunt figures

standing or sitting, but most of them were sprawled on the road and sidewalk where they had collapsed. In their last struggle to survive, these tragic figures of skin and bone had attempted to walk as far as possible and when the last bit of energy had been wrung from their feeble bodies, they simply dropped dead," wrote Belton Cooper.

Further ahead, the captain spotted three 120-metre-long piles, each barely two metres high. At first glance, he assumed the piles were waste paper and rubbish, but he soon realised the reality:

"To my abject horror I noticed that parts of the stacks were moving. Suddenly, I realised that these stacks were naked human beings, writhing in their excrement and left in the open to die. The stench was overwhelming."

Despite the inhuman cruelty, Cooper's experience was far from unique. The large piles of corpses and living skeletons were all prisoners from the nearby Mittelbau-Dora camp. As the Allies made their way into Nazi Germany, similar labour and extermination camps were exposed as the war took a new turn. Before long, no Allied soldier doubted that the war needed ending as soon as possible to put an end to the inhumane suffering. The Germans, on the other hand, were busy erasing the traces of 12 years of systematic

German locals were forced to bury the victims of the Mittelbau-Dora camp as punishment for their presumed complicity.



torture and extermination that had begun in the Dachau camp just five weeks after Hitler took power.

Starving prisoners marched to death

As Allied troops advanced, the Germans cleared the prison and concentration camps before they could be liberated by the Allies. Those prisoners who were still able to walk were sent on long death marches. The rest were either left to die or killed in brutal ways, such as being set on fire while in their barracks.

Early on, the Allies remained blissfully unaware of the German camps. Sergeant Thomas W Clarke was part of a group of infantrymen travelling in jeeps ahead of the Allied forces to scout for German resistance. Usually, the scouts only encountered scattered groups of terrified boys, but deep in enemy territory, they witnessed the first signs of the death marches. As Clarke's unit approached a forest near the town of Roding, they came across a large group of haggard people who, after a while, realised they were facing American soldiers.

"Those able to walk came out of the woods and started to sing the French national anthem, La Marseilles. It touched us deeply," Clarke wrote in his memoirs. Neither the sergeant nor others in his unit could immediately grasp what they were witnessing.

"Dozens of bodies were stacked in the woods after dying the night before. What was this that we had come upon? Interpreters informed us that this had been a march started somewhere from a German prison camp or concentration camp. They later became known as 'death marches'," the sergeant recounted.

The men in Clarke's unit had seen plenty of death and horror during the war, but their encounter with the prisoners in the forest left a permanent mark:

"All of us were greatly moved and had mixed emotions of empathy or a desire for revenge. One thing is certain, this scene is indelibly imprinted in my mind and will never be forgotten."

Stories of Nazi crimes against Jews and other minorities ►

The truth about Dachau had to come out

Twenty-eight doctors struggled to help the prisoners at Dachau. One was David Wilsey, who described the situation to his wife.

8th May 1945

My Most Precious Being,

Europe's war is over! The emotions in my heart (& the hearts of every 116th Evacer & 127th Evacer) just are more tumultuous than millions of others BECAUSE Emily, we are sweating, stinking, "existing" in The-Hell-On-Earth-DACHAU!

Dearest, the atrocity reports are true – and more! For over 8 days I've seen-lived-smelled-"existed" it as one of 78 doctors to try to correct the medical-horror-component of The-Hell-On-Earth. Bodies starved to 50 lb [22.5 kg], men piled like rotting cord-wood! Huge gas chambers built like shower rooms (as a ruse)! Hangman's scaffolds! Cremating ovens for dead-dying or still conscious skin-&-bone wrecks of humanity!

Stepping high as you walk to work over dead bodies in the street – Storm Troopers (The SS), riot prisoners, & man-eating Doberman pincer dogs – all rotting!

We roared through the gates of Dachau figurative "minutes" after its liberation – while 40,000+ wrecks-of-humanity milled, tore, looted, screamed, cried as/like depraved beasts which the Nazi SS has made them. In those early "minutes" I saw captured SS tortured against a wall & then shot in what you Americans would call "cold-blood" – but Emily! God forgive me if I say I saw it done [without] a single disturbed emotion BECAUSE THEY SO "HAD-IT-COMING", after what I had just seen, & what every minute more I have been seeing of the SS-Beasts' actions.

Why! The horror is so unbelievable that they flew Congressmen to see it the day we came. That famous W[ashington] DC woman correspondent (Life mag) ate with us this noon to see it. Ambassador Caffery (to France) saw it today. Eisenhower is expected any minute. All Europe's biggest Cabinet, Ambassadors, newsreelers, etc have been or are here to MAKE SEEING = BELIEVING.

Look for me in a news reel.

AND! – to think this is only "The Queen Bee" camp – others are worse though much smaller & it is here the "policies" were worked out for other lesser camps. In fact, this Dachau is the "Home" of SS Bestiality – Himmler's "laboratory" & hangout.

All my love
Dave

The horrors of Dachau were epitomised in the chilling letters that field doctor David B Wilsey sent from the camp to his wife in the US.

V-E DAY

My Most Precious Being,

Europe's war is over! The emotions in my heart (& the hearts of every 116th Evacer & 127th Evacer) just are more tumultuous than millions of others BECAUSE Emily, we are sweating, stinking, "existing" in The-Hell-On-Earth-DACHAU! [I've seen-lived-smelled-"existed" it as one of 78 doctors to try to correct the medical-horror-component of The-Hell-On-Earth. Bodies starved to 50 pound men piled like rotting cord-wood! Huge gas chambers built like shower rooms (as a ruse)! Hangman's scaffolds! Cremating ovens for dead-dying or still conscious skin-&-bone wrecks of humanity!]



A propaganda poster from Great Britain in 1941 depicted Hitler as a beast. The caricatured, negative portrayal was rare in World War II propaganda.



Allied rhetoric was more subdued early in the war, to avoid showing the enemy in such a distorted way that could backfire.

had been circulating in the West since 1942, but few people believed them.

During World War I, the propaganda machine portrayed the Germans as pure barbarians who ravaged, raped and slaughtered civilians. When these reports later turned out to be greatly exaggerated, many Allied soldiers became sceptical of the portrayals of the enemy. During World War II, this scepticism changed the moment Allied troops witnessed the German genocide first-hand.

Eisenhower saw the horrors for himself

Dwight D Eisenhower didn't believe the stories of the death camps. As Allied commander-in-chief, he heard countless stories, but always dismissed them as exaggerations. That was until he visited Ohrdruf on 12th April, eight days after its liberation. Two days later, he wrote to General George C Marshall about his experience, which had shocked the war-weary general:

"The visual evidence and the verbal testimony of starvation, cruelty and bestiality were so overpowering as to leave me a bit sick. In one room, where [there] were piled up twenty or thirty naked men, killed by starvation, George Patton would not even enter. He said he would get sick if he did so," Eisenhower wrote.

"I made the visit deliberately, in order to be in position to give first-hand evidence of these things if ever, in the future, there develops a tendency to charge these allegations merely to 'propaganda'."

More camps continued to be uncovered throughout Germany, and on 11th April, US soldiers liberated the Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar, which journalist Edward R Murrow visited four days later.

"I asked to see one of the barracks. It happened to be occupied by Czechoslovaks. When I entered, men crowded around, tried to lift me to their shoulders. They were too weak. Many of them could not get out of bed. I was told that this building had once stabled eighty horses. There were 1,200 men in it, five to a bunk. The stink was beyond all description," the journalist reported on CBS radio.

"They called the doctor. We inspected his records. There were only names in the little black

book – nothing more – nothing about who had been where, what he had done or hoped. By the names of those who had died, there was a cross. I counted them. They totalled 242 – 242 out of 1,200, in one month. As we walked out into the courtyard, a man fell dead. Two others, they must have been over 60, were crawling toward the latrine. I saw it, but will not describe it."

Edward Murrow knew that it would be difficult for listeners to comprehend the scale of the atrocities.

"I pray you to believe what I have said about Buchenwald. I have reported what I saw and heard, but only part of it. For most of it I have no words ... If I've offended you by this rather mild account of Buchenwald, I'm not in the least sorry," he said to conclude his harrowing report.

On the same day, the British liberated the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in northern Germany. The camp was not an extermination camp and had no gas chambers, but 37,000 prisoners had died of starvation or exhaustion from forced labour.

Widespread typhus outbreaks forced the Allies to keep prisoners in the liberated camps until they no longer posed a risk of infection. BBC reporter Patrick Gordon Walker witnessed the horrors in Belsen in the days after liberation:

"One woman came up to a soldier who was guarding the milk store and doling the milk out to children, and begged for milk for her baby," he reported. *"The man took the baby and saw that it had been dead for days, black in the face and shrivelled up. The woman went on begging for milk. So he poured some on the dead lips. The mother then started to croon with joy and carried the baby off in triumph. She stumbled and fell dead in a few yards."*

Danger awaited the released prisoners

On 25th April, American and Soviet troops made contact near the town of Leckwitz on the Elbe River, cutting the Third Reich in half. The roads were teeming with refugees and prisoners of war trying to make their way from east to west. American Norman Norris had been held in a prison camp near Berlin and was sent west – away from the advancing Red Army.

"Even the camp guards marching with us were glad to be marching westwards. With the advancing Russian soldiers discovering the hell-like conditions their compatriots were being kept in, it was little wonder that it was into British or American hands they wished to fall," Norris explained.

After a few days, the group's guards escaped.

"We were now in a rather tricky position, sandwiched between the Germans and the advancing Russians," Norris recalled.

The prisoners took refuge on a farm where fierce fighting between the Soviets and Germans ►

FACTS

During their time in power, the Nazis set up

44,000

prison camps of various kinds. This figure included ghettos and prisons in addition to the labour and extermination camps.

Dachau was the model for other concentration camps



Dachau was where the rulebook for all Nazi concentration camps was conceived. It was founded in 1933, just five weeks after Adolf Hitler came to power. This makes Dachau the longest-running camp, lasting almost the entire 12 years of Hitler's reign. At the former weapons factory just outside Munich, guards obtained most of the experience required for the internment, exploitation, torture and extermination of prisoners. By the end of the war, Dachau comprised around 100 smaller sub-camps. Part of the blame for the atrocities can be attributed to Heinrich Himmler, who, after Dachau's founding, personally developed ideas for its experiments.



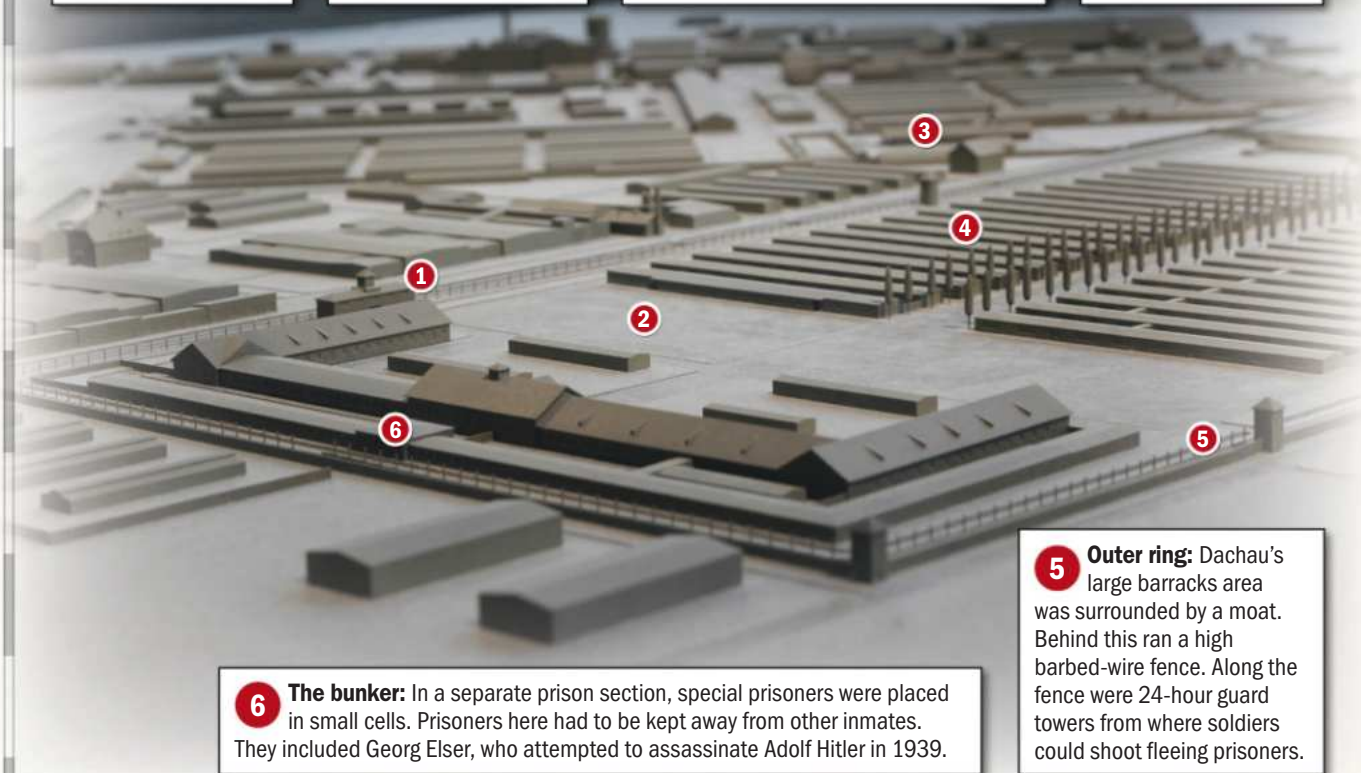
In letters, Himmler suggested how Dachau's doctors could perform experiments on prisoners using pressure and cold, for example.

1 Entrance: In the iron bars at the main gate of Dachau, the words *Arbeit Macht Frei* (Work Shall Set You Free) are wrought in iron. A camp commander later took charge of the Auschwitz camp and copied the motto, which became famous.

2 Roll-call Square: In the large central square, around 40,000 prisoners would stand to attention for headcounts every morning and evening. This was also where public punishments, including whippings and hangings, were meted out in front of the other prisoners.

3 Barrack X: A barrack close to the camp housed the gas chamber and crematorium. Because of the gas chamber, Dachau could function as an extermination camp, but was not used as such. According to inmates, the chamber was only used to a limited extent for executing small groups. The crematorium, on the other hand, ran around the clock to burn the bodies of the thousands of prisoners who died from hunger, disease and harsh treatment from the guards.

4 The barracks: The huge barracks were freezing cold in winter. Prisoners slept in big beds built on top of each other in three layers. Each bed housed five or six people. Disease and lice spread like wildfire among the densely packed population.



5 Outer ring: Dachau's large barracks area was surrounded by a moat. Behind this ran a high barbed-wire fence. Along the fence were 24-hour guard towers from where soldiers could shoot fleeing prisoners.

6 The bunker: In a separate prison section, special prisoners were placed in small cells. Prisoners here had to be kept away from other inmates. They included Georg Elser, who attempted to assassinate Adolf Hitler in 1939.

In the Ebensee camp, thousands of prisoners died from cold due to lack of clothing. The camp was not liberated until 6th May 1945, two days before the end of the war.





developed. The PoWs were caught in crossfire that included machine-gun fire and mortar shells.

"The Russians now poured a withering fire at this last remaining gun crew, completely eliminating them. Unfortunately our Sergeant Major with another man was sheltering in a house near the gun site. A heavy tank shell went right through the walls, decapitating them both. It was indeed a tragedy after four years of imprisonment to be killed within minutes of freedom," Norris sadly concluded.

The bitter deaths emphasised that the torment was far from over for the prisoners in the camps. For many, liberation was the start of a new struggle.

Allies found the original camp

News of Nazi crimes slowly spread among the soldiers. Having seen a US prisoner of war camp in New York State, company commander Bill Walsh was expecting a similar sight to greet him when he was ordered to liberate a camp near Dachau in Bavaria on 29th April.

On the outskirts of the camp, his men came across 39 abandoned wagons that presented a gruesome sight.

"And here are all these goddamn people in it. And you kind of figure, well, maybe they're sleeping. Maybe they're hungry. You soon realise: they're all dead! What the hell is this?" Walsh recalled.

The commander's question about what the camps were would be answered in Dachau. He and his men were about to enter the camp where the entire German extermination programme had begun. In the freight wagons, the soldiers found 2,000 naked and rotting corpses. Lieutenant Colonel Felix Sparks arrived. On the ground, he spotted a prisoner who had managed to crawl out of one of the boxcars, only to have his skull crushed by a German rifle butt, leaving his brain matter splattered on the ground. The sight made the lieutenant colonel ▶

AT THE SAME TIME

NETHERLANDS:

- Emergency aid is dropped to starving Dutch people.

ITALY:

- Mussolini is executed.

BERLIN:

- Hitler marries Eva Braun.

In Dachau, the SS developed a labelling system that recorded the reason for each prisoner's imprisonment.

Special characters indicated specific circumstances about the prisoner, such as being known for attempting escapes.

Kennzeichen für Schutzhäftlinge in den Konz. Lagern						
Form und Farbe der Kennzeichen						
	Politisch	Berufs- Verbrecher	Emigrant	Bibel- forscher	homo- sexuell	Sozial
Grund- farben	Red	Green	Blue	Purple	Orange	Black
Abzeichen für Kriegshäftlinge	Red triangle	Green triangle	Blue triangle	Purple triangle	Orange triangle	Black triangle
Häftlinge der Straf- kompanie	Red triangle with dot	Green triangle with dot	Blue triangle with dot	Purple triangle with dot	Orange triangle with dot	Black triangle with dot
Abzeichen für Juden	Yellow star	Green star	Blue star	Purple star	Orange star	Black star
Besondere Abzeichen	Jüd. Rasse- schänder	Rasse- schänderin	Flucht- verdächtig	Häftlings- nummer	Brilliert	
	Yellow triangle	Yellow star	Red circle	2507	2508	
	P	T	Wehrmacht- angehöriger	Häftling Ia		
	Pole	Italien				



WEAPONS OF EXTERMINATION

Crematorium

Crematorium erased all traces

The Nazis knew that their actions in the concentration camps violated international conventions. In Dachau and other camps, crematoria solved the problem by burning all traces of their horrific treatment of prisoners.

Unlike Auschwitz, Dachau was not an extermination camp. Its prisoners worked themselves to death. Disease killed many, as did hunger, while the SS guards' abuse and medical experiments also claimed hundreds of

lives. In 1942, the SS built a new crematorium close to the camp with ovens that burned corpses around the clock. Of the 188,000 prisoners who were held in Dachau over the years, official estimates put the death toll at

32,000, but it's likely much higher. Towards the end of the war, the ovens couldn't keep up, and when US soldiers liberated the camp, there were piles of thousands of bodies that the German soldiers hadn't had time to cremate.

1 WAITING ROOM

These were separate rooms where prisoners had to wait before 'showering'. In an adjacent room, they were told to undress.

2 GAS CHAMBER

In a shower cubicle with room for over 100 people, groups of prisoners were gassed. The deadly Zyklon B poison gas could be dosed through hatches in the wall. It was rarely used in Dachau, as the prisoners were used for forced labour.

4 INSPECTION ROOM

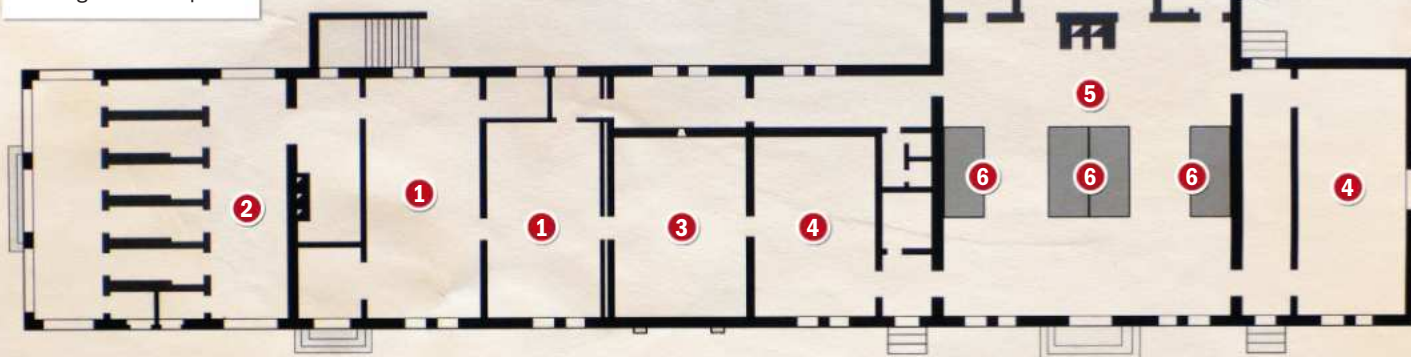
The bodies were searched for gold teeth and anything else of value in this room. Dachau was the first camp where the practice was carried out. During the war, the Germans collected a total of around 17 tonnes of gold from all the camps.

5 CREMATORIUM

The bodies were transported into the crematorium, where some executions also took place, such as hanging from loops in the ceiling.

3 LAUNDRY ROOM

The victims' clothes were cleaned so they could be handed out to new prisoners arriving at the camp.



6 THE OVENS

The four ovens were fitted with double doors that reduced the wall of heat when opened. Each oven had capacity for seven or eight bodies – nine if the victims were children or particularly emaciated. Cremation lasted between ten minutes and two hours, depending on the number burned and fuel used. The ashes were scattered in fields and rivers.





Prisoners' clothes were still hanging in front of the gas chamber doors when US forces liberated Dachau in April.

vomit. Hunger for retribution started to simmer and one of the soldiers muttered: *"Don't take any SS alive!"*

Frightened and confused, but also furious, the US soldiers crossed the last few metres to the entrance of the camp. Four SS soldiers who hadn't fled were promptly executed.

Dachau's jailers slaughtered

In one of Dachau's prison barracks lay French author and resistance fighter Robert Antelme. Before his capture in July 1944, he'd weighed 90 kg. By the time the camp was liberated, he'd been reduced to just 35 kg of skin and bones, miraculously clinging on to life. His internal organs were clearly visible through his parchment-like skin. Along with his fellow prisoners, the Frenchman could hear the sound of gunshots nearby.

"They're here," said one of the prisoners. With an effort, Antelme managed to pull himself up in time to see American helmets pass by outside the barracks.

"We're free! We're free!" Antelme shouted, and any prisoners who had the strength limped, crawled and dragged themselves to their American liberators. Gunshots were heard in the camp. US soldiers shot the camp's guard dogs after prisoners explained how the Germans had trained the animals to tear and rip at

sticks tied to their testicles. Lieutenant Colonel Sparks recalled that "the stench of death was overpowering" throughout the camp. Several of his men reported being able to smell the camp from several kilometres away.

Sparks and his men were embraced by happy prisoners. Polish Walenty Lenarczyk was one of them.

"All we could think about were Americans. For the past six years we had waited for the Americans, and at this moment the SS were nothing ... It was truly our second birthday," said the prisoner.

As the Americans set about rounding up the few remaining SS soldiers, the camp's prisoners began a campaign of retribution against any Germans or informants they could get their hands on. Four SS soldiers were trampled to death by a group of prisoners. Those dubbed 'kapos', prisoners who'd helped the Germans run the camp, were torn to pieces. A group of Soviet prisoners grabbed a German and pulled each of his legs until he split in half with a loud crunching sound as the bones broke. The US soldiers had no pity for the Germans and did nothing to stop the liberated prisoners. A few Americans, including Bill Walsh, even took part in the executions. A large group of German soldiers, many of whom came from a war hospital next to the camp, were lined up against a wall and shot with machine guns ►

FACTS

Twelve Third Reich leaders were sentenced to death at the Nuremberg Trials in October 1946. Several of those executed, including **Hans Frank and Joachim von Ribbentrop**, were cremated in Dachau.

You kind of figure, well, maybe they're sleeping. Maybe they're hungry. You soon realise: they're all dead! ■ Lieutenant Bill Walsh on the discovery of dead prisoners in train carriages.

and pistols. Corporal Henry Mills witnessed this illegal execution of prisoners of war.

"Geez, we came over here to stop this bullshit, and now here we got somebody doing the same thing," Mills said. Later, after walking around the camp, he suddenly felt a sudden yearning: *"I've been here too long. I've to go home now,"* he thought after three years away.

For many prisoners, however, freedom had come too late. Those already weakened by hunger and typhus quickly succumbed, leaving the Allies with a logistical headache.

Prisoners had to stay behind fence

As agonising as it was, the Allies had to leave the prisoners behind the barbed wire. Typhus had struck among the prisoners and could not be allowed to spread outside the camp. At the same time, it was

much easier to take care of the many sick and starving prisoners if they remained together.

"You must remain here," Lieutenant Colonel Sparks explained to the prisoners.

"We're bringing food, water and medical attention to you as rapidly as possible."

Soldiers were quickly stopped from throwing food to the starving prisoners for fear they'd tear each other apart for crumbs.

The weakened prisoners had to wait until the army could ship in food for everyone. On 30th April, the first supplies arrived. The next day, future French President Francois Mitterrand was visiting the camp when he heard someone calling his name. It was Robert Antelme, who had found the strength to crawl from his barracks. The two were friends from the French Resistance, and Antelme begged to be taken with Mitterrand. But the author had to stay in Dachau, even though he was near death. Mitterrand was allowed to take a letter to Antelme's wife in Paris, in which the starving Frenchman said his farewells:

"Goodbye, Marguerite, you can't imagine how painful your name is to me."

Mitterrand estimated that Antelme would be dead within three days, so set out with two of Antelme's friends to smuggle the writer home. On 3rd May, they returned to the camp with an extra French uniform, in which they dressed Antelme, then they dragged the thin, skeletal man into a car that immediately drove to the

US soldiers shot SS soldiers after liberating Dachau. The number executed varied from 16 to 520 depending on the source.



French border. They had to take the journey extremely carefully, as even minor vibrations might stop Antelme's fragile heart. In Paris, they carried the 35 kg of remaining skin and bones into Marguerite's house. When she saw her husband, she let out a startled scream and turned away. After some hours she mustered up the courage to see him. She lay down with him, fed him and refused to sleep, fearing that he would die while she dozed off.

"We gave him gruel that was golden yellow, gruel for infants, and it come out of him dark green like slime from a swamp," she recalled.

The gruel was the only thing Antelme's digestive system could tolerate. After a long time, he recovered. Only then did Marguerite dare to tell him that she had fallen in love with someone else and wanted a divorce. Antelme survived, unlike millions of Jews, gypsies, communists, disabled people, homosexuals and other minorities who didn't fit into Nazi plans for the German people. They were disposed of in death and labour camps or through random mass executions.

In the camps, the torment continued. In Dachau, 30,000 prisoners were still being held a month after liberation. The day after Dachau's liberation, Adolf Hitler committed suicide in Berlin, ensuring he would never have to personally answer for the Nazis' crimes against humanity. ■



The Battle Creek Enquirer.

Michigan, 30th May 1945

Dachau Is Still Scene of Death

60 to 100 Inmates of Prison Camp Dying Daily.

DACHAU, Austria — (UP) — Death still stalked Dachau today, 25 days after its liberation.

For the inmates of this notorious concentration camp, liberation has meant little. From 60 to 100 men still are dying daily. Another 3,000 are almost hopeless cases. The corpses left by the Nazis have been cleaned away, but their places have been taken by new rows of bodies.

Typhus, typhoid, dysentery and the effects of a starvation diet are taking their toll. The camp's new chief doctor, Franktche Flaha, estimated today up to 3,000 of the prisoners here are still close to the danger point.

Twenty-four hours a day smoke curls from the stubby crematorium chimneys. But the furnaces cannot keep pace with their grim task.

Flaha himself was a former inmate, a surgeon from Czechoslovakia. He said many of the men doomed to die might be saved if three things could be provided:

First, three times as many medical personnel. Second, twice

as many medical supplies. And third, a means of taking the worst cases to real hospitals where special treatment would be available.

Dr Flaha said that American medical authorities stationed nearby were "cooperating to the utmost", but there just weren't enough men, equipment or places to take the patients. In any event, most of the cases left by the Nazis were too far gone to be saved no matter what was done for them.

A trip through a dozen crowded, darkened wards showed row upon double-decked row of men whose emaciated bodies were atrophied beyond the point of taking new nourishment, whose eyes were dulled beyond hope of revived life.

A quarantine for typhus kept most of Dachau's 30,000 prisoners inside the camp's walls. They milled about among the flimsy, green-walled barracks with bowed shoulders. They had the aimless shuffle of men who have suffered beyond caring what the future held.

They were free, but it didn't make much difference, except maybe that they were no longer afraid.

Deaths still occurred in Dachau after the Allied invasion. Before liberation, around 200 prisoners died every day according to records.

Dachau Is Still Scene of Death

60 to 100 Inmates of Prison Camp Dying Daily.

BY MALCOLM MUIR, JR.

DACHAU, Austria — (UP) — Death still stalked Dachau today, 25 days after its liberation.

For the inmates of this notorious concentration camp, liberation has meant little. From 60 to 100 men still are dying daily.

“I couldn't have lasted another day”

By Else Christensen

Jack Adler was just ten when the Nazis invaded Poland. For the next six years, he experienced the Holocaust first-hand in the Polish ghettos, Auschwitz and finally Dachau. His entire family was murdered and Adler himself barely survived – thanks to the rare help of an SS officer.

You were ten years old when the Nazis invaded Poland. What were the first days of the occupation like for you? Did you have any idea of what it would mean?

It was the first week of September 1939. There were six of us in my family: my parents, my older brother, my older sister, myself and my younger sister. I only realised what the occupation of our town, Pabianice, meant after a few days. By then, the occupying forces had put up posters. They told the Jewish population that no Jew was allowed to go outside without wearing two yellow Stars of David on their clothes – one on the front and one on the back. That's when I realised that something was going on.

It wasn't long before you were moved to a ghetto. What were the conditions like there?

We were moved to the ghetto, which was in our town, in February 1940. It was an open camp – more or

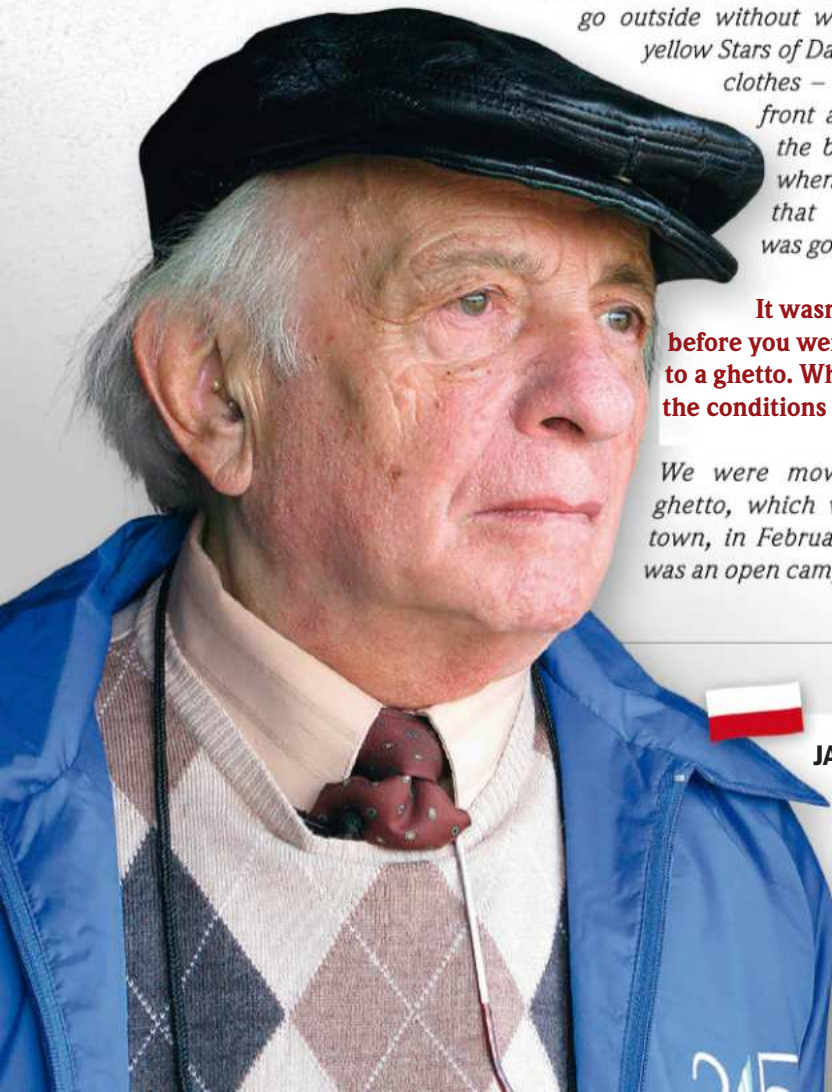
less – which meant that families could still stay together. But it was painful to see people starving and being ill without receiving any help. The daily ration consisted of just a slice of bread and a bowl of potato soup. Both my brother and my mother died while we lived in the ghetto in Pabianice. It was dissolved at the end of 1942 and then we were sent to the ghetto in Lodz, which was also in Poland.

What happened when you were moved?

When they dissolved the ghetto, we were divided into two groups, called A and B. Group A was the people the Nazis considered “useless eaters” – the old, the sick and the very young, those who couldn't work and therefore had no right to live. My younger sister was in group A.

My father, my older sister and I were in group B. This was for people who could work and therefore, in the Nazis' opinion, had the right to live for a while longer. The Nazis drove us out on to a football pitch. It was pouring with rain. When it was 22.00 or 23.00, they came up to us in group B to ask if anyone would volunteer to help clean up and collect rubbish in the area where group A was located.

I was hoping to see my little sister, so I volunteered. Each volunteer was equipped with a pram. Back then, prams were very deep and



JACK ADLER (1929-)

Jack Adler was born in 1929 in Pabianice in central Poland and lost his entire family in the Holocaust. His mother and brother died in the ghetto in his home town, while the rest of his family was murdered in concentration camps – one sister in Auschwitz, the other in Bergen-Belsen, and his father in Dachau.



roomy. I slowly walked from group B towards group A, making sure I bent down regularly to pick up paper or clothes so that I wouldn't attract attention.

It was dark on the football pitch. Most of the light came from the headlights of lorries that the Germans had parked in such a way that the lights could shine on us. Slowly, I walked closer to group A. Then I started calling out for my sister. Some of the people who were still in group A repeated her name. To my surprise, she was still there. She came running towards me. I signalled to her, so she understood not to come too close to me.

"Wait until it's darker and then try to climb into the tram," I told her.

And she did. Then I slowly started walking back towards group B, where my dad and my older sister were waiting for me. As I walked, I picked up some paper and clothes again, but this time it was to have something to cover my sister so that no one would see her. If the Nazis had realised what we were doing, they would have killed us on the spot.

When I got close enough to group B, where my father and sister were waiting, I told them that she was in the tram. Hidden by the darkness, we helped her out. Group A was sent to an extermination camp. They all died the same day. We in group B were sent to the Lodz ghetto.

What were the conditions like in Lodz?

It was a very large ghetto. A lot of people were sent from small towns, like us, so I guess the population of Lodz was as much as 300,000 people at the height of the ghetto. The ghetto was also completely different from the one we had previously lived in. The area was surrounded by barbed wire and they built all kinds of factories in the ghetto so that people could work for the Nazi war machine.

How long did you remain in the Lodz ghetto?

We stayed in the Lodz ghetto until the end of the summer of 1944. When they disbanded the ghetto this time, we were all sent to the railway station. Once there, all of us were forced into cattle wagons. We were crammed together like sardines. When a wagon was completely full, they locked the doors shut from the outside. We travelled for several days and had no idea where we were going. We had no food or drink. The only



The ghetto in Pabianice was cleared in 1942 and the Jews were sent to the larger city of Lodz, 16 kilometres away.

equipment in the wagon was a barrel used for human waste.

When we arrived at our destination [Auschwitz-Birkenau camp], the doors were opened and we were greeted by Nazi officers and soldiers with whips and dogs. They shouted at us to get out of the wagons and line up in rows of five, men and women separately, and march forwards. Then we went through a selection process. It was conducted by – well, we didn't know the name at the time, of course – but it was Josef Mengele and his executioners.

As you approached them, they watched you. If they thought you looked strong enough to do slave labour, you were sent to the left. And again, the old, the sick and the very young – including my little sister, whom I had rescued two and a half years earlier – were sent to the other side, to the right. We didn't find out that day, but the next day we learned that they had been sent to the gas chamber.

What kind of work were you assigned to do?

Those who were sent to the left were moved to different concentration camps to do slave labour. About a week passed and then my father and I were moved on. During the selection process, it was decided that we would go to the Kaufering camp in Germany. It was part of Dachau. There, my father and I were put to work on a construction site. The Nazis were building an underground hangar for aeroplanes. Our job was to carry sacks of cement that arrived by train and we had to take them from the station to the ►



Orphaned after the war, Jack Adler was sent to live with a family in the United States, where he grew up and still lives. Jack Adler is co-author of the book *Y: A Holocaust Narrative*, and regularly gives talks about his experiences.

construction site. We carried sacks back and forth for 12 hours every day. It was horrible, but if you wanted to stay alive, you did your best. If you started to slow down – which I did – they would beat you with whips. One of the guards was particularly vicious. He took a broom handle and hammered a nail into it. If you didn't move fast enough, he would strike you so that the nail hit you on the back of the neck. I still have a scar from being beaten. And if it hadn't been for my dad, I'd probably have bled to death. But my father tore a piece of paper from one of the cement sacks, spat on it and pressed it against the wound.

How long did you stay in Kaufering?

I stayed there until around March or maybe the end of February 1945. Then I was separated from my father and sent to the main Dachau camp. Most of the people who stayed there were not Jews. In fact, Jews made up maybe only ten per cent or even less. There were many Soviet prisoners of war and a lot of political prisoners.

But I kept working at the same construction site where I'd worked when I was in Kaufering, because that camp was part of Dachau. Occasionally, I would see my father when I went to or from work. We waved when we passed each other. We couldn't talk to each other. They didn't tolerate that.

In 1945, you were assigned to a completely different kind of work. What was it like?

Each group of 25 prisoners or so had a kapo assigned to it. A kapo was a kind of foreman. His

job was to make sure the tasks given to the group were carried out properly. One of the superiors was a colonel in the SS. One day he ordered my kapo to send him a young prisoner to keep his office clean. I was the youngest in the group, so he chose me. It was much easier than working on the construction site. All I had to do was sweep the floor and dust the furniture. It was getting cold by then. He had a small stove that was fuelled by wood. My job was also to keep the fire going.

Every day when I arrived at his office, the first thing I did was sit down by the stove and remove the ashes. Almost every day, when I opened the small door to the chamber with the ashes, I found a small waxed bag lying on top of them. In the bag were pieces of bread or bacon that he had put there for me to find. That helped me a lot.

You had a bad experience in the camp. What happened?

At the end of March, the Nazis allowed the Red Cross to visit Dachau so they could distribute food parcels to the camp's non-Jews. However, there were some parcels left over that were distributed to the camp's youth. I received one such parcel.

It was the end of March 1945 and the Germans needed a lot of things. One of the things they lacked was sugar. The parcel I received contained a small bag of sugar. I immediately opened my parcel and hid its individual parts on my body so no one would take them away from me. But when we went back to the camp after I had received the parcel, one of the Nazi guards came up to me. He asked me if I had received a parcel that day.

"Jawohl," I replied. "Do you still have the sugar?" he asked, and I said yes.

When I told him I still had the sugar, he opened the bag he was carrying over his shoulder and took a large slice of bread out of the bag and showed it to me. He said that if I gave him the sugar, he would give me a slice of bread like that every day. I gladly gave him the small bag of sugar and he gave me the bread.

"Every day you'll get a slice of bread like this," he promised me before I moved on.

So, the next day, as we marched to work, I made sure I walked to the far end of the line where he



Children going to the gas chamber. As early as 1942, the Nazis began sending children in Lodz to be killed in Chelmno. Jack Adler was just big enough to be allowed to work.

The officer, a high-ranking SS colonel, spoke to me like a human being. It was the first time in five years that this had happened. ■ Jack Adler on the German colonel who helped him.

stood guard so he could see me. After we had been walking for a while, he walked past me. He looked at me and I looked at him. Then he said:

“Was magst du haben?” – “What do you want?”

At first, I thought he didn't recognise me, so I told him that I was the one who'd given him the sugar and that he had promised me a slice of bread every day. When I told him this, he took the rifle and slammed the butt into my chest between my ribs. “Here's your bread,” he said.

That day, I almost didn't make it to the officer's office. As I said, the first thing I did every day when I arrived was sit down on the floor and rake the ashes out of the stove. When I finished, I was in so much pain that I was unable to get up again. I started to cry. The officer, a high-ranking SS colonel, spoke to me like a human being. It was the first time in five years that this had happened, and it was a high-ranking officer who spoke to me like a human.

“Was ist los, mein Junge?” – “What's the matter, my boy?” he said. I knew that for a Jew, snitching on a Nazi guard to a high-ranking officer could have very harsh consequences. But I was in so much pain that I didn't care what he did, so I told the officer what had happened. He instructed me to point out the guard to him in the evening when we were mustered. We had to do this every day after work before we were marched back to camp. That way they could see if anyone had escaped during the day.

I reluctantly agreed and pointed the guard out. While walking back to the camp, I hid in the middle of the group. About 500 of us walked together and I hoped the guard wouldn't spot me. When I had gone some distance, I could see out of the corner of my eye that the guard was carefully looking over the rows of prisoners. I told myself that I would be killed now, because no one would stop him. But when he saw me, he reached out his hand and gave me a piece of bread. I could hardly believe my eyes. When I got back to the officer's office, he asked me if the guard had given me any bread.

“Yes, sir,” I said. “Every day, he'll give you the piece of bread he promised you,” he said. “If he doesn't do it one day, let me know. I will take care of him.”

Why do you think the officer helped you?

He was a high-ranking Nazi officer, but he was also a decent person trapped in the Nazi organisation like so many other Germans who

didn't know how to get out. They were afraid to leave – they were scared of being punished. The way I see it, he saved my life.

How long did you stay in Dachau?

I stayed there until around the 25th or 26th of April. That's when they sent almost 7,000 of us on a march, which became known as the death march. We marched during the day, then at night we slept in the forest, but sometimes they would suddenly order a group to go off to one side and dig a trench. When the trench was finished, those who had dug it were ordered to line up at the edge and then they were shot.

When we were liberated by the US Army on the morning of 1st May 1945, there were fewer than 4,000 of us left. I was very weak. I couldn't have lasted another day.

Do you remember the moment when you were liberated?

Yes, it was early in the morning and still dark, and I remember the adults talking loudly. That was something you weren't supposed to do. I went over to them and asked what was going on. They told me that the SS had disappeared. They had sent the Wehrmacht – ordinary soldiers – to keep an eye on us instead.

A few minutes later, jeeps, tanks and lorries with military personnel arrived. They pulled up alongside us and stopped. One of the officers stood up on the bonnet of his jeep.

“This is the United States Army. You are all free,” he shouted. That's how we found out we we'd been liberated.

It was unbelievable. I was hospitalised straight away and weighed only 30 kilograms. They looked after me wonderfully well during the three months I was in hospital. I was sent to the US in December 1946 and went to live with a lovely foster family in Chicago, Illinois. So here I am. I'm 92 years old now and have two incredible children, a son and a daughter, and four grandchildren.

You were just a child when all this happened. How did you survive?

Every night when they allowed us to go to sleep, my father told me not to give up. “It will be all right. Don't give up. We will see our loved ones,” he said. That helped me to keep going. Many gave up along the way and committed suicide. ■



Theft, looting and rape became commonplace in Germany's bombed-out cities. Allied soldiers demanded retribution and payment for their suffering.

GERMANY, YEAR ZERO

Germany, spring/summer 1945



I, who swore I hated
them all ... We fed,
treated, even
caressed them.

Soviet medic Sofya Adamovna Kuntsevich on Berlin's children.

Nazi Germany no longer existed. The Reich had been divided into four, and left without a government, police or fire brigade, while its citizens lacked food, clothing and shelter in conditions worse than when Hitler rose to power. A fragile international alliance had to rebuild the country and reveal a path away from Nazism.

By Benjamin Alkærsig Christensen

The German generals had been made to wait all day for the Allies at the landing site in Berlin. A week earlier, Berlin had finally surrendered, and today – 8th May 1945 – the peace treaty would be signed in front of the major Allied nations.

The ceremony didn't begin until just after midnight. The German delegation led by Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel was ushered into the room where the Allied representatives waited. Behind the field marshal, a tall German officer stood weeping. For many of the German officers, this was the second time they'd had to deal with the humiliation of losing a world war.

Soviet Marshal Georgy Zhukov stood up and spoke in Russian: *"We invite the German delegation to sign the act of capitulation."*

An interpreter started to translate the words. Field Marshal Keitel dismissed him with the message that he'd understood. Instead, the German gestured for the documents to be brought before him.

"Tell them to come here to sign," barked the Russian marshal, keen to remind the Germans who was in control.

Keitel and the rest of the German delegation signed the document with shaking hands.

"The German delegation may leave the hall," Zhukov ordered. As soon as the Germans left the room, the tense atmosphere lifted, and everyone broke out in wild cheers. The war in Europe was finally over.

What remained was a bombed-out continent that needed rebuilding. Berlin itself was a horror story. Large parts of the city were in complete ruins, and those residents who hadn't already died or fled cowered among the rubble and in basements. They relied on their Soviet occupiers to bring them food and water. At the same time, every German feared the Red Army's desire for revenge. Thousands of fathers and sons had already been sent to Siberian labour camps. Meanwhile, drunken Soviet soldiers dragged away women aged eight to 80, subjecting them to gang rapes.

The war was over, but the struggle continued for German civilians – especially in Berlin, where simmering arguments between the victors threatened to plunge the country back into war.

War victims came to light

The morning after the Allies celebrated the German surrender in Berlin, the city lay quiet. Most Soviet

soldiers were taking a well-deserved sleep, exhausted after weeks, months and years of fighting. Twenty-five-year-old French forced labourer Henri Daries left the basement he'd been hiding in for several weeks:

"I leave our hiding place in the basement. At once, I am seized by a strange atmosphere... Silence. A deafening silence after days and nights of explosions, roars and shooting."

All over Berlin, people emerged from hiding – including a few Jews who'd survived in Berlin against all odds. Alice Löwenthal was one of those who now realised that the war was over and that she'd survived:

"When I had finally grasped it, I could no longer contain myself. It was impossible to hold back the tears. The day we'd been yearning for had finally arrived."

In the weeks and months that followed, she tried to find out what had happened to her children, who'd disappeared after being deported in 1944.

"Yesterday, I went to the Jewish hospital in Schulstraße. The kids had been there last year, but were taken away again. I was told they were taken to Auschwitz. I want to maintain my strength for all of you until you are with me. I will not surrender hope," Löwenthal noted in her diary.

Her hopes were boosted a few weeks later when she met an Auschwitz survivor.

"I met a Mr David who had walked back from Auschwitz. He told me that the kids are almost certainly still alive because they only arrived last September and they had hardly killed any children since then ... It's a horrible thought. They killed children, and maybe mine are among them."

The mother's hunt would end in vain. Her two daughters, Ruth and Gittel, had died in Auschwitz, along with around a million other Jews. Löwenthal would be left to come to terms with her grief.

Hitler's teeth confirmed Reich's end

There was a huge desire among the Allies to hold the Nazis accountable for the incomprehensible catastrophe they'd unleashed. One of the first things the Soviets did after the German surrender was to search for Adolf Hitler.

The Nazi Führer took his own life on 30th April, but his death had yet to be confirmed. On 4th May, the Soviets found the presumed remains of Hitler and his secret lover, Eva Braun, whom the Führer had

FACTS

Nazi Germany officially surrendered on 7th May. **Two days later, the country capitulated again** when the Soviets demanded that the surrender took place in Berlin and that it was signed by Wilhelm Keitel, Germany's military leader.

I am so scared. They are picking up all the men. Our policemen have been collectively taken away. ■ Berliner Brigitte Eicke on deportations.

married the day before they both committed suicide. A Soviet report described the discovery:

"Close to Hitler's Chancellery, next to his personal bunker, two bodies were discovered – one male, one female. The corpses are badly burnt and it is impossible to identify them without further information."

One of the bodies appeared to be Hitler, according to the description in the subsequent autopsy, which also stated the cause of death: a capsule containing poison.

"We can say that the man is between 50 and 60 years old, 1.65 metres tall. The body is charred and smells of burnt meat. The glass splinters in his mouth suggest he used a thin vial," it concluded.

To make sure that the remains were indeed Hitler's, Soviet experts removed the teeth and lower jaw, which had been better preserved than the rest of the charred body. Käthe Heusermann was an assistant to Hitler's personal dentist and had assisted on several occasions when the Führer required dental work. Her assessment of the teeth was clear.

"I held the dental bridge in my hand. I looked for irrefutable evidence. I immediately found it, took a deep breath and burst out, 'These are the teeth of Adolf Hitler,'" she stated. Poor dental

hygiene and gingivitis had ruined Hitler's teeth, and since 1934 he'd required both bridges and crowns. Therefore, Heusermann could easily end the hunt for the world's most dangerous man by confirming that the Soviets had found the Führer's teeth.

Refugees filled the roads

Hitler left the Reich in chaos. Of Germany's 70 million inhabitants, up to 30 million found themselves on the run in the early summer of 1945. Families had been torn apart and everyone was desperately searching for missing members.

In every town and city, there were boards on which hopeful Germans posted notes with the names of the family members they were trying to find: *"I am looking for Frieda Winkler née Jonuscheit →*



Wilhelm Keitel signed the German surrender in Berlin. Two days earlier, Nazi leaders had tried to negotiate a continuation of the war against the Soviet Union.

Königsberg Pr. (Ostpr.) – Horst Winkler – Wittenheuen,” read one of the many postings.

During the search, families were torn apart again. Long columns of German men marched under duress to the east, where an uncertain future awaited. The Red Army gathered up all the uniformed men they found. Wehrmacht and SS soldiers, sometimes even Hitler Youth children, elderly people with Volkssturm armbands, police officers and firefighters were all sent on a march towards the Soviet Union. Brigitte Eicke watched as they were rounded up.

“I am so scared. They are picking up all the men. Our policemen have been collectively taken away. Our old policemen. The women, standing in the street as they were led away, cried. We might not live much longer,” she wrote.

Around three million German men marched east to toil in labour camps for the next few decades. A third of them would never return.

Elbe was a coveted border

In the last days of the war, hundreds of thousands of German civilians and soldiers tried to get as far away from the Soviets’ punitive actions as possible. The

Eastern and Western Allied advance met at 11.30 on 25th April near the town of Leckwitz on the Elbe River. It meant the river would also mark the border between the Soviet and Western occupation zones in Germany – as had been agreed by the Allied leaders. The German civilians struggled to get behind the Western Allied front when the war ended, and desperate scenes unfolded as thousands of German civilians and soldiers attempted to cross the great river in the hope of reaching safety in the west.

Paratrooper Harry Henkel joined a group of young boys from a work unit. Their ageing major tried to help them cross over.

“The Elbe was one kilometre across ... Part way across the Elbe, as difficult and as awkward as it was, we ditched our uniforms. For the boys it was a case of being easier to swim without their restrictive uniforms. For me it was much simpler. If I’d come out of the river in my paratrooper uniform I would have been sent to a PoW camp. That was the last thing I had in mind,” wrote the German paratrooper.

Henkel and the group managed to swim across the Elbe River, where they were met by the Americans. The German soldier had an Australian mother and ►

Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin decided how to split Germany at a meeting in Yalta, Ukraine, in 1945.



The former Reich was split into four – and moved westwards

Germany had lost World War II, while the entire world had suffered enormous losses both in human lives and – apart from the US – economic terms. The victors found themselves with somewhat opposing interests, but preventing a future war was widely agreed upon.

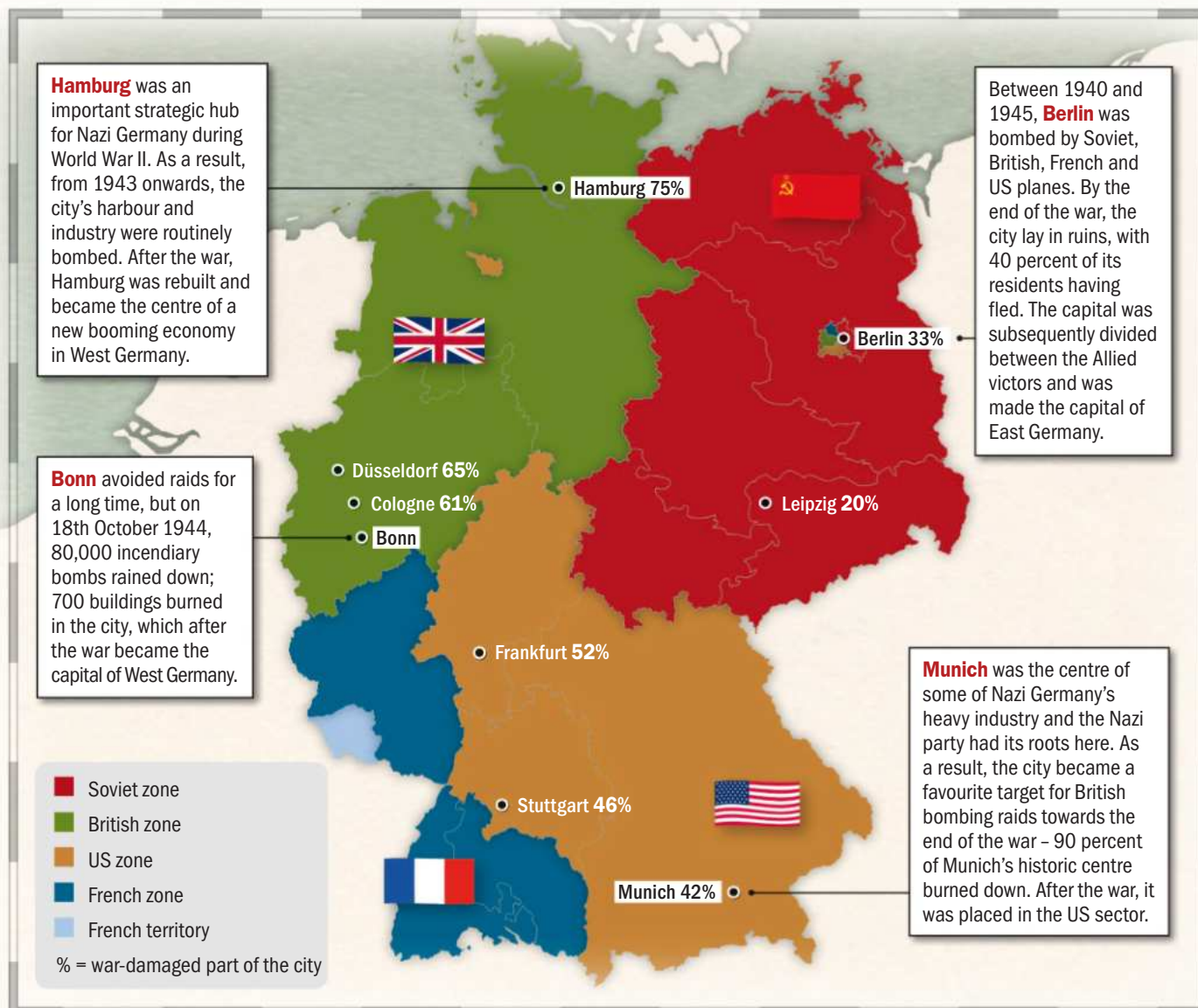
Therefore, after the war, the Allies divided Germany into US, Soviet, British and French occupation zones, which would govern indefinitely so that the Germans could neither arm nor rebuild their heavy industry. Instead, Germany would become a predominantly agricultural country whose main purpose was

self-sufficiency. In addition, Berlin, located deep inside the Soviet occupation zone, was also carved into four sectors.

A large part of the former German Reich was handed to Poland as compensation for the territory the Soviet Union had occupied in 1939 and insisted on keeping. To avoid future conflict in the area, the Allies relocated up to 14 million Germans from east to west, including German-speaking citizens in Czechoslovakia. The forced relocation was intended to be humane, but up to 500,000 died in the process.



Hamburg's submarine shipyards were left in ruins to prevent new production.



understood English, so he listened as the Americans spoke and heard one of them ask a pertinent question:

"What are we going to do with these lads, they are only kids?" Another answered: *"Send them home to their goddamn mothers."*

The Americans gave the German soldiers some discarded uniforms, a few field rations and papers stating that they had been interrogated by the US Second Army and found to be of no interest. For Henkel, the war was over and with his passport in hand, he could return home.

Senior Nazis hid among refugees

Although Henkel and his comrades escaped captivity, other Germans were hunted down. The Allies were

determined to capture and try surviving senior Nazis, many of whom were uncovered when they attempted to blend in with refugees in civilian clothes or uniform and slip through the countless checkpoints the Allies had set up everywhere to capture Nazis.

On 22nd May, three German soldiers were stopped at a British checkpoint near Bremervörde in northern Germany. One of the men, wearing an eye patch, showed his papers, which revealed his name as Heinrich Hizinger. He was a sergeant, and soldiers of such low rank were rarely questioned closely. But the British soldiers were intrigued by a mark on the papers that appeared on documents belonging to former SS members who'd tried to trick their way through the checkpoints, so Hizinger was detained. The next

US and Soviet troops met at the Elbe River on 25th April 1945 to cut Germany in half. Soldiers celebrated the milestone as one.



SS police chief Ernst Kaltenbrunner is arrested after a shoot-out in a mountain cabin. He is hanged in 1946.

Karl Dönitz, Albert Speer and Alfred Jodl are arrested in Flensburg as part of the post-Hitler government. Jodl is hanged.

Nazi Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop is discovered and arrested in Hamburg. He is hanged in 1946.

morning, he asked to see an officer, then removed his patch and revealed his identity. The British had accidentally captured Heinrich Himmler. A doctor was called in to examine the former SS leader in charge of the German death camps. The doctor discovered a small blue ampoule hidden in Himmler's mouth and immediately tried to extract it. The top Nazi fought back, biting hard on the capsule and dying shortly afterwards from the toxic contents of the capsule.

Many high-ranking officers and party members tried hiding in Germany, while others attempted to flee to Spain, where Franco and his fascists were still in power. From there, they could sail along so-called rat routes to South America and escape punishment. Thousands escaped in this way, including the

architect of the Jewish holocaust, Adolf Eichmann, and 'Angel of Death' Josef Mengele.

With the fall of Nazism and large parts of the police force marched off to the Siberian gulags, Berlin became a lawless haven for criminals. The Soviet soldiers who occupied East Germany and the capital in the spring of 1945 looted their way through the city's streets. Forty-three-year-old Berliner Marta Mierendorff recorded the unrest in her diary:

"It feels strange to no longer be in charge of your own country, but to be exposed to the whims of lawlessness. Where there was once a forced order, now there is chaos."

The occupiers pressed machine guns into the stomachs of unfortunate Germans in search of coveted wristwatches and everything from windowpanes to nails to send home to their families. The Soviets defended their actions by saying that their own destroyed homes need to be rebuilt.

The worst crimes inflicted were the widespread rapes that began while the Battle of Berlin still raged. When the war reached a house or street, residents took shelter in the basements. As soon as the fighting and the front-line soldiers moved on, the reserves and supply troops entered the basements. They forced everyone present to hand over valuables and then abducted the women, who were gang-raped by Soviet soldiers. As they dragged away screaming women and girls as young as eight years old, help was rarely forthcoming.

"Go along, for God's sake! You're getting us all into trouble," one man yelled at someone who tried to resist.

The nuns at a convent in the Berlin neighbourhood of Dahlem were also victims. No one was safe. Even ►



After the war, European countries received support from the US via the Marshall Plan initiative.



Support included wind turbines to help Europe get back on its feet.

The PoW struggle continued for years

For the millions of Germans who ended up as prisoners, freedom was a long time coming. In Soviet camps, one in three died.

In the summer of 1945, the Allies on the Western Front held 1-2 million Germans as prisoners of war, struggling to feed and house them. The numbers exceeded all calculations, so the prisoners lived in camps on the Rhine on the brink of starvation, exposed to the wind and rain. Their toilets were simple holes in the ground and disease spread easily.

Some prisoners were forced to work in reconstruction in the UK and France, while hundreds of thousands of German PoWs in the US were employed as agricultural labour for 80 cents a

day. The last PoWs in the West returned home in 1948. Many thousands chose not to return to East Germany.

German prisoners of war in the Soviet Union were put to hard labour. Often their working day lasted 10-12 hours, including felling trees, working in mines or building roads and railways.

Food rations were poor, disease killed many, and so did the Siberian cold. Of the more than three million German prisoners in Soviet camps, one in three died. The last captured Germans weren't finally released until 1956 – 11 years after the end of the war.

Prisoners in US camps had to dig holes with their hands to find shelter. An estimated 3,000-6,000 Germans died in the camps from hunger, thirst and cold.

the Soviet women who'd been sent to Berlin by the Germans for slave labour were raped en masse by the rampaging Red Army.

"Soviet girls liberated from the camps are suffering a lot now. Tonight, some of them are hiding in our correspondents' room. During the night, we are woken up by screams: one of the correspondents couldn't resist the temptation. A noisy discussion ensues, then order is re-established," recalled Soviet war correspondent Vasily Grossman.

Thousands of Berlin women fell victim to the widespread assaults that took place night after night. Between 95,000 and 130,000 women were raped; 10,000 were killed before, during or after their ordeal.

Pregnancies and STDs were rampant

In the weeks and months after liberation, thousands of Berlin women discovered they'd become pregnant by their Soviet abusers. Marie Jalowicz Simon overheard her landlady being raped in her house.

"I heard from the floor below hysterical screaming and screeching: they had got to Frau Koch as well," said Miss Simon, who was of Jewish descent and had miraculously survived in the city throughout the war.

"Hannchen Koch had always wanted a baby, and now, for the first and only time in her life, she was pregnant by that one act of sexual intercourse



with a Russian. Many women of child-bearing age soon felt the same consequences,” recalled Jalowicz Simon. The women were often forced to abort the unwanted pregnancies.

“In our neighbourhood there was a practising doctor by the name of Hering, and the residents all went to her. This doctor, an ardent supporter of Nazi principles, was of course a passionate opponent of abortion. But now she was carrying them out as if on a conveyor belt: German women must not bear children by the enemy – such was the ideology.”

STDs spread unhindered among both soldiers and women who’d been raped. Doctor Anne-Marie Durand-Wever tried to treat as many unfortunate rape victims as possible.

“I’m now trying to acquire gynaecological instruments to be able to perform all necessary examinations. The results for gonorrhoea are horrifying. Just today I examined a 15-year-old girl who’d been infected. In the afternoon, my friend Ruth came with her daughter. Four Russians,” the horrified doctor noted.

“Swab inconclusive, but certainly antibiotics. This is what you protect your child for.”

Some women, such as Jalowicz Simon, got off relatively lightly compared to others. Like many, she was among the first victims of the Soviet soldiers who *“rampaged through the houses raping women. Naturally I was among them. I slept in the attic, where I was visited that night by a sturdy, friendly character called Ivan Dedoborez,”* she recalled.

“I didn’t mind too much. Afterwards he wrote a note in pencil and left it on my door: this was his fiancée in here, it said, and everyone else was to leave her alone. In fact after that no one else did pester me.”

As a result, Jalowicz Simon was raped only once, an eerie and grotesquely merciful fate in post-war Berlin. As rough as some Soviet soldiers could be, others were just as gentle and helpful. As she recalled:

“Some of the men were very helpful, touchingly kind to children, and showed respect for the old. One fair-haired Russian who came to us to get his neckwear laundered particularly impressed me. He could speak a little broken German, and was intelligent and forthcoming; he came from Moscow, and in civil life was a chauffeur. I tried to tell him that I was very glad of the Red Army’s victory. He shook his head and said, ‘Nix good. [H]itler kaput – Stalin toshe (also) kaput – democracy good.’”

The Soviets were themselves surprised at how quickly they went from hating an enemy that had caused unspeakable suffering to feeling pity for the Germans. When a group of starving German children appeared in front of medic Sofya Adamovna Kuntsevich, her hatred quickly dissipated.

“They hid ... I, who swore I hated them all ... I gathered from our soldiers all they had left of their



A wounded, low-ranking Luftwaffe officer is arrested by Canadian troops in the town of Sögel in the final weeks of the war.

rations, any piece of sugar, and gave it to the German children. Of course, I didn’t forget ... I remembered everything ... But I couldn’t calmly look into their hungry children’s eyes,” the hardened military woman recalled.

“We fed, treated, even caressed them ... The first time I caressed one ... I got scared ... Me ... Me! Caressing a German child ... My mouth went dry from agitation. But soon I got used to it. And they did, too,” Kuntsevich added.

But caresses and crumbs weren’t enough to get the German population back on its feet. Famine loomed with German agriculture in ruins like its cities. Fields had been burned, cattle slaughtered, and machinery and horses exhausted on the battlefields, while ►

Lightweight, affordable tractors were imported to Europe under preferential credit after the war.

The grey Ferguson tractors were a symbol of Marshall Aid.

Tractors mechanised agriculture and increased European food production.



farmers had fled or died in the war. Across the country, people stood in long queues at the few shops that had meagre supplies to sell.

"I have a picture of a boy with three breads, they were still hot, and he was smiling ... He said, 'This is the first time I could buy bread,'" recalled US soldier and photographer Tony Vaccaro.

In all four Allied sectors, the Allies strove to provide enough food for the many hungry German civilians. But often there wasn't enough food for everyone.

"We suffered greatly from hunger in Germany. We stood for hours and hours in front of stores in the hope we might be able to buy two ounces [60 grams] of butter. And I tell you, a pound of butter cost around 500 marks on the black market," Frankfurt native Gunda Eckart recalled. Like so many others, the 21-year-old struggled to find a job to feed herself.

"I desperately wanted to find work that not only paid money, but also provided food, so I went to the Frankfurt employment office – and they sent me to the Americans. I was employed as a waitress in the officers' club. At first, I thought to myself: 'You can't take this job – a waitress.' It wasn't exactly what I had wished for, but when I heard I would receive at least one meal a day and perhaps even two, I immediately accepted."

However, not everyone found work with the new occupying powers, and many of the Allied soldiers, who were otherwise forbidden to fraternise with the locals, quickly discovered that a pound of coffee, a loaf of bread or a litre of fresh milk could endear them to young German women.

Soviets took power in Berlin

The Red Army soldiers distributing food in East Germany had no idea that famine had also broken out in several Soviet provinces and that their families were forced to survive through cannibalism. The Soviet victory had come at an unbelievable cost, and now Soviet leaders eyed their reward. While the fighting had gone on in Berlin, the Soviets were aware of Germany's

impending political void after Nazism's collapse. In anticipation, the Soviets had put together a so-called Ulbricht Group under the leadership of German Communist Walter Ulbricht. He, like the other members of the group, had spent the war in service to the Soviet Union. The group's task was to scour German society to find people for an East German government apparatus free of former Nazis. In return, the government was expected to be full of pro-Soviet advocates.

One member of the group was 24-year-old Wolfgang Leonhard, who was flown from Moscow to Berlin:

"Nothing to see all around – no city, no buildings, nothing. Two young officers approach us and say, 'We are very happy to be able to welcome you here. We have heard that you are members of the new German government.' I almost choke. What did he just say?"

The officers were telling the truth. Many members of the Ulbricht group were unwittingly destined for a role in East Germany's future government. When Leonhard attended a meeting, realisation dawned:

"In a classically Saxon accent, Ulbricht explained to us, 'It needs a semblance of democracy. We must retain control of everything,'" wrote Leonhard.

One totalitarian regime had been replaced by another. Society had to be slowly rebuilt. Leonhard and his colleagues started translating Soviet news reports into German, and before long, German state radio was full of praise for the Soviet liberators who'd delivered the German people from the fascist yoke.

For the ordinary German in liberated Berlin, there was little difference at first. Instead of a one-party state led by the Nazis with Adolf Hitler in charge, they now lived with Joseph Stalin and the Communists in power. Where they used to live in fear of being turned over to the Gestapo, it was now the NKVD who hauled people away in the dead of night.

With new systems in place, the first priority was to clean up Berlin and the other bombed-out cities. Everywhere, streets were blocked by debris, with houses little more than shells, their collapsed floors lying in heaps of rubble several metres high. Across the cityscape, all signs of Nazism were removed. Swastikas, eagles, pictures, flags and other symbols were burned, crushed or melted down.

There was also a clean-up taking place among the population. Anyone with connections to the Nazi party had to face up to a future with extremely limited prospects, but first they had to physically rebuild Germany. Eighteen-year-old Brigitte Eicke, who like many of her peers had been a party member before the fall of Berlin, noted the clean-up in her diary with horror.

"Mr Scheppes came upstairs and said that, starting tomorrow, all members of the party had to report for work. Apparently we start at 06.00 in Christburger Straße. If it's only work, it's certainly bearable. But there's a lot of talk about deportation ►

FACTS

Allied raids destroyed

97%

of the buildings in Jülich, Germany's most bombed city. Jülich was rebuilt in 1949 following the plans of the town's old Renaissance centre.

Hitler was erased from the streets of the city of Krefeld during the US Army's advance.



The new bomb was enough to end the war. The bomb would also change the relationship with the Russians. ■ Field Marshal Alan F Brooke on the atomic bomb.

and detention. The time has come to do penance for my affiliation with the party," she wrote.

In the US sector alone, 12 million Germans were asked to fill out questionnaires about their time in Nazi Germany. They had to answer questions such as: Which Nazi organisations were you part of? How did you earn money? Did you fight Nazism?

American Gene Mater – looking for non-Nazis to staff a free German newspaper – discovered how it made his job more difficult when interviewing a prospective employee.

"He was about 30 or late 20s, and he was very, very smart. He really wanted to work for a newspaper – had no background in it, but really

wanted to ... I felt that he would be good [but] one of my colleagues in the intelligence section didn't trust him ... He checked and turned up files that proved this guy had been in the SS – a Propagandakompanie ... So we arrested him and he was tried."

Not all former Nazis were fortunate enough to simply be brought to justice. Allied soldiers often went on personal retribution raids. The Soviet sector was the worst affected, with thousands of Germans picked up from their homes and taken to local command units.

"A lady appeared and insisted that my husband accompany her to the Kommandantur [Command Centre]. He has been missing ever since. My

Women laboured to clean up the ruins in 1948. These Trümmerfrauen (rubble women) were paid a paltry wage despite working 10-12 hours a day.



husband is 71 years old and has trouble with his bladder. He was a member of the party, but never actively involved in anything," said one Berliner.

After Germany's surrender on 9th May, the Soviets had held control of Berlin and eastern Germany, but on 30th June, the Western Allies arrived to take over their agreed sectors of the capital and on the same day, East Germans finally heard the first BBC radio broadcast live from Berlin.

"The official Allied occupation of Berlin has begun. The United States' 2nd Armored Division is entering the American zone of the city today," announced BBC reporter Richard Dimbleby.

Allied relationship went cold

On 4th July, the Soviets and Americans held a joint parade in Berlin to celebrate Independence Day in the US. Everything remained amicable, but both powers realised that the collaboration would be tense. During a meeting on 7th July, the first cracks had already started to appear. Brigadier General Frank L Howley of the US Army recalled the meeting:

"If ever the fate of Berlin had hung by a thread, it was on July 7th at the meeting with Zhukov. He brusquely announced: 'And now, gentlemen, let us discuss the question of how you intend to supply Berlin with food and coal.' An icy wind from the steppes swept through the room."

Marshal Georgy Zhukov insisted that the Western Allies contribute large amounts of food and coal to ease the situation in Berlin and East Germany. Britain and the US agreed to help in the genuine hope that the Soviets could become a long-term ally in Europe. But if not, they held a secret weapon that would forever shift the balance of power and ensure the Americans had the upper hand in negotiations. Field Marshal Alan F Brooke of the British Army recalled his first encounter with the ultimate weapon – the atomic bomb.

"I went to lunch with the Prime Minister. He had just read the American reports about the results of the secret experiments with the atom bomb. 'It would not be necessary,' he said, 'for the Russians to enter the war with Japan' – the new bomb was enough to end the war. The bomb would also change the relationship with the Russians. Then we could just say, 'If you insist on doing this or that, then we will wipe out Moscow from the map, then Stalingrad, Kyiv, Sebastopol and so on,'" he wrote.

In August, the US demonstrated the immense power of nuclear weapons, ending the war with Japan. Germany was dissolved and rendered powerless. The war was over, but echoes would ring 45 years into the future. With sectorisation and a tenuous alliance, Berlin rapidly became the world's new sore point.

In the ashes of Hitler's empire, the first seeds of the Cold War between the world's new superpowers were already starting to germinate. ■

WHY CHURCHILL PREDICTED THAT...

...an iron curtain would descend on Europe

Churchill warned against Hitler before World War II. Now he hoped that similar warnings about the Communists would secure Europe against the Soviet Union's dreams of great power.

During World War II, Winston Churchill cooperated with the Soviet Union and its leader, Joseph Stalin. He even fought to send extra support to the Soviets in their fight on the Eastern Front. On 5th March 1946, all war alliances were dissolved.

"A shadow has fallen upon the scenes so lately lighted by the Allied victory. Nobody knows what Soviet Russia and its Communist international organisation intends to do in the immediate future, or what are the limits, if any, to their expansive and proselytising tendencies," said Churchill. The words were spoken at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, with President Harry S Truman in the audience.

Churchill, who had already worked to defeat the Communists during the Russian Civil War in 1917, had viewed Stalin purely as a necessary ally in the fight against Nazism. Now that victory had been won, Churchill believed it was important to stop the rise of Communism so that it didn't spread

beyond the borders established at the end of World War II.

"From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and, in many cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow." In this way, Churchill foreshadowed the physical Iron Curtain, which only came into being in 1961 with the construction of the Berlin Wall. The former prime minister also warned against allowing Communist parties in Allied countries.

The Iron Curtain became a reality as a 7,000-kilometre border zone emerged between Eastern and Western Europe.



EUROPE – May 1945

FINLAND



- Soviet sphere of influence
- US, British and French sphere of influence
- Neutral nations

0 200 400 km

Americans stumbled
across Nazi treasures
during the advance
through Europe. Here,
the Holy Roman imperial
crown from the
12th century.

SOVIET UNION

• Moscow

• Kyiv



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**A soldier runs between trenches during
Hitler's Battle of the Bulge in December
1944. The US positions were overrun in
the first days of the attack.**



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The Allied war machine inched towards victory

In the final phase of the war, Allied confidence was at an all-time high. After D-Day's success in June 1944, the Allies had advanced virtually unopposed across the Western Front, and US General Bradley dared to welcome German counter-offensives. But with supply lines stretched to the limit, exhausted troops and a Wehrmacht still capable of putting up bitter resistance, he would come to regret his words...

